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Ramadan Timings	
Fajr	03:49
Shurooq	05:13
Dhuhr	11:46
Asr	15:22
Maghrib	18:20
Isha	19:42

VOLVO

## 'Fierce battles' rage in east Ukraine as 5.2 million flee

### War enters its third month; death toll mounts



**BORODIANKA:** A man cries near a minivan with the coffin of his son, who died in the nearby building when it collapsed following a Russian air strike, on April 21, 2022 prior to the funeral ceremony in the small Ukrainian town of Borodianka. — AFP

**ZAPORIZHZHIA:** "Fierce battles" raged in eastern Ukraine on Saturday all but killing hopes of an Easter truce as officials said they would make a fresh attempt to evacuate civilians from the war-torn city of Mariupol. The war enters its third month on Sunday with civilians continuing to pay a heavy price amid the ongoing fighting.

Authorities in two eastern Ukrainian regions—Kharkiv and Lugansk—said fighting with Russian forces raged on Saturday. The governor of the eastern Kharkiv region, Oleg Sinegubov, said on Telegram that Ukrainian forces retook three villages near the Russian border after "fierce battles". Sinegubov added that Russian forces had also attacked residential infrastructure, killing two people. In nearby Lugansk, governor Sergiy Gaiday said shelling was "round the clock".

He called on people near the front to "evacuate if you have the chance", saying volunteers were helping people leave the area. Nearly 5.2 million Ukrainians have fled the country of 37 million since Russia's invaded in late February, the UN refugee agency said Saturday. The fighting in the east came a day after a senior Russian military officer said "the second phase of the special operation" had begun,

with the aim of controlling a huge, strategic part of Ukrainian territory.

"One of the tasks of the Russian army is to establish full control over the Donbas and southern Ukraine," Major General Rustam Minnekaev said on Friday. Russian forces, which withdrew from around Kyiv and the north of Ukraine after being frustrated in their attempts to take the capital, already occupy much of the eastern Donbas region and the south.

Minnekaev said their focus was now to "provide a land corridor to Crimea," which Russia annexed in 2014, and towards a breakaway pro-Russian region of Moldova, Transnistria, where the general claimed Russian-speaking people were "being oppressed". Ukrainian authorities have vowed to fight on and drive the Russian troops from their land, but they also sought an Easter pause. "Unfortunately, Russia rejected the proposal to establish an Easter truce," said President Volodymyr Zelensky earlier this week.

In the south, authorities were set to make a fresh attempt Saturday to evacuate civilians from the besieged port city of Mariupol. "Today we will again try to evacuate women, children and the elderly," Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said.

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Ramadan Kareem

## Themes of the Quran: Stories of the prophets

By Teresa Leshner

The Quran, which was first revealed in the month of Ramadan, mentions 25 prophets by name, and relates their stories as a guidance for contemporary communities. Through these stories, we see a general pattern of how Almighty God sent various people to warn their communities of the dire consequences of worshipping false gods and committing shameful acts, and the events that transpired when those prophets confronted their people.

Although, according to the Quran, there will be no more prophets after Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), we can benefit from his story as well as those of the prophets who came before him. One of the most eminent prophets was Abraham, who is mentioned 73 times in the Quran. He rejected the worship of celestial bodies, fire, and all false gods.

The Quran says, "When the night covered him over, he saw a star. He said, 'This is my Lord.' But when it set, he said, 'I love not those that set.' When he saw the moon rising in splendor, he said, 'This is my Lord.' But when the moon set, he said, 'Unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray.' When he saw the sun rising in splendor, he said, 'This is my Lord; this is the greatest (of all).' But when the sun set, he said, 'O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of giving partners to Allah."

For me, I have set my face, firmly and truly, towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I give partners to Allah" [6:75-79]. Abraham was a staunch believer and pure monotheist, an example for all people. The Quran says, "And who would be averse to the religion of Abraham except one who makes a fool of himself... When his Lord said to him, 'Submit,' he said, 'I have submitted to the Lord of the worlds.'" (2:130-131).

Abraham and his son Ishmael build the Kaaba in Makkah, around which Muslims pray until today. Another well-known prophet mentioned

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## Zionists close Gaza crossing after attacks

**JERUSALEM:** Zionist entity said it will close its only crossing from the Gaza Strip for workers on Sunday in response to overnight rocket fire, stopping short of conducting retaliatory strikes in an apparent bid to ease tensions. The rocket attacks on Friday night and Saturday morning followed days of clashes at Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound and a month of deadly violence.

The unrest—which comes as the Jewish festival of Passover overlaps with the holy Muslim fasting month of Ramadan—has sparked international

fears of a wider conflict, one year after similar violence led to an 11-day war between Zionists and Gaza-based militants. "Following the rockets fired toward Zionist territory from the Gaza Strip last night, it was decided that crossings into Zionist entity for Gaza merchants and workers through the Erez Crossing will not be permitted this upcoming Sunday," said COGAT, a unit of the Zionist defense ministry responsible for Palestinian civil affairs.

Two rockets were fired from Gaza at southern Zionist entity on Friday night, one of them hitting the Jewish state and the other falling short and striking near a residential building in northern Gaza, Palestinian and Zionist sources said. A third rocket was fired at Zionist entity on Saturday morning, the army said, with no air raid sirens activated for any of the launches.

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**AMMAN:** A young boy carries a replica of the Dome of the Rock mosque and waves a Palestinian flag as demonstrators march in the streets of the Jordanian capital Amman on April 22, 2022, to show solidarity with Palestinians. — AFP

## Bahrain artisans toil to preserve tradition

**MANAMA:** Bahrainis with a sweet tooth have long been spoiled for choice between a wide array of dessert franchises, but traditional confectioners still hold their ground, especially during Ramadan. At the back of his modest shop in the capital Manama, Mohammed Gharib stirs a thick mixture of sugar, saffron and freshly blanched almonds, transforming it into a uniquely Bahraini version of the ubiquitous Middle Eastern dessert: halva.

"Bahrain became famous for its confectioneries by being a pioneer in this industry in the Gulf region," Gharib told AFP, adding that their popularity of its establishments "continues until today". Clad in Bahrain's traditional "shemagh" headdress and white "dishdasha" robe, the 70-year-old runs one of the country's oldest confectioneries, named after its founder Hussain Mohammed Showaiter, who established it in 1850.

"Hussain Mohammed Showaiter was keen to develop this craft, and passed it on to his children and grandchildren," Gharib said. As Bahrainis celebrate Ramadan along with the rest of the Muslim world, the holy month is a period of appreciation for traditional sweets. For Mohammed Al-Fardan, the familiar Bahraini confections remain a fixture on tables for the iftar meal, in which the faithful break



**MANAMA:** Cars drive past the Saleh Radhi Al Halwachi sweet shop in Jid Hafsa village on the outskirts of Bahrain's capital Manama. — AFP

their dawn-to-dusk fast. "Their presence is a reminder of Bahrain's heritage and sense of hospitality," the 51-year-old banker explained. Though the Gulf region has been swept by a deluge of fast food chains, Fardan is quick to point out that "modern sweets contain preservatives, unlike traditional confectionery". — AFP (See Page 13)

## Iran-Saudi talks resume in Iraq

**BAGHDAD:** Regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia have resumed key talks in the Iraqi capital Baghdad after negotiations were suspended last month, a senior Iraqi official said Saturday. "Talks resumed last Thursday in Baghdad," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity, and without giving further details.

Iran's Nour news agency confirmed a meeting attended by "senior officials from the secretariat of Iran's Supreme National Security Council and the head of the Saudi intelligence service". Shiite-majority Iran and the Sunni kingdom of Saudi Arabia support rival sides in several conflict zones across the region, including in Yemen, where the Houthi rebels are backed by Tehran, and Riyadh leads a military coalition supporting the government.

In 2016, Iranian protesters attacked Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran after the kingdom executed revered Shiite cleric Nimr Al-Nimr. Riyadh responded by cutting ties with Tehran. The talks in Iraq—which borders both Iran and Saudi Arabia—are the fifth round of meetings in the country in the past year between Tehran and Riyadh aimed at restoring ties.

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## Local

## News in brief

## Kuwait bans film over gay character

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has banned Marvel's 'Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness' from local theaters for featuring an openly gay character and dialogue about homosexuality, according to reports. The movie contains nearly 45 minutes of footage featuring a character wearing an LGBTQ+ symbol which are difficult to be edited out, the reports said of the reasons behind Kuwait's decision. Saudi Arabia has reportedly banned the movie as well for the same reason.

## Domestic labor offices warned not to overcharge

**KUWAIT:** Domestic labor recruitment offices are not allowed to overcharge clients or ask them to pay more fees than the KD 890 recruitment fee as stipulated by law, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said. The Ministry had previously released a notice warning domestic help offices in Kuwait against violating the law that regulates recruitment fees and sets the total fee to recruit a domestic helper from abroad at KD 890 including the plane tickets.

## Kuwaiti oil price down \$1.11 to \$109.81 pb

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwaiti oil price fell by \$1.11 to reach \$109.81 per barrel (pb) on Friday, compared with \$110.92 pb the previous day, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said on Saturday. In international markets, Brent crude oil contracts dropped by \$1.68 to \$106.65 pb, while West Texas Intermediate went down by \$1.72 to reach \$102.07 pb. —KUNA

## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** Tailors working in a tailor's shop in Kuwait City on Saturday. Demand has been high for dishdashas, the traditional dress in Kuwait, as social gatherings returned during Ramadan after two years of closures due to COVID-19. Demand is getting higher with the approach of Eid Al-Fitr as most shops are fully booked until mid-June. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz winners receive their prizes

**KUWAIT:** Fatima Abdulwahab, Mariyam Karam Ali and Winefredo Costelo received their 'Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz' awards at Kuwait Times head office. The winners received KD 50 in cash each and a one-year newspaper subscription. Participation in the Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz is open for everyone living in Kuwait until the end of the holy month. To participate, follow Kuwait Times on Instagram (@kuwaittimes), answer the daily question posted on the account and mention three people. The winner is announced the following day in the stories on Kuwait Times' Instagram account, with the winner's name tagged. The winner will be contacted via direct message and can collect the prize at Kuwait Times head office.



Fatima Abdulwahab with her father after receiving the award.



Mariyam Karam Ali receives her award from Kuwait Times Advertising Manager Taleb Kanjo.



Winefredo Costelo receives his award from Kuwait Times Advertising Manager Taleb Kanjo.



## Firemen tackle blazes in two Hawally buildings

**KUWAIT:** Firemen battled fires reported in two buildings in Hawally on Saturday, which left no injuries. The first fire was reported in an old building in the area which was first evacuated before firemen extinguished the flames. The second fire was reported in an abandoned building and was quickly put out. Investigations went underway to reveal the causes of the fires, Kuwait Fire Force said in a press statement.



## Kuwait keeps helping vulnerable people worldwide

**KUWAIT:** Under the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Kuwait goes on providing support and aid to the vulnerable and needy inside and outside the country. In this context, a Kuwaiti Air Defense plane carrying 40 tons of medical aid landed at Bucharest International Airport in a bid to alleviate the sufferings and woes of Ukrainian refugees in Romania. The Kuwaiti humanitarian gesture came in response to international calls for sending humanitarian and relief assistance to Ukrainian internally displaced persons and refugees.

Kuwaiti Ambassador to Romania Talal Al-Hajri and embassy staff welcomed the accompanying team of the humanitarian aircraft to the airport. The ambassador said Kuwait's relief aid came at the behest of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, reflecting Kuwait's humanitarian role in easing out the anguish of people worldwide. He added that the initiative came in response to an international humanitarian appeal for helping Ukrainian displaced persons and refugees.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced the distribution of 6,500 boxes of dates to Yemeni displaced persons in the governorates of Marib, Aden and Lahj on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan. Abdelrahman Al-Oun, director general of the KRCS, said the aim of this project is to help the poorest families during this month. Moreover, the society also handed out about 4,500 food baskets to the needy in Kuwait. KRCS Secretary General Maha Al-Barjas said in a statement that one basket includes rice, sugar, dates, oil, food, chicken and others, adding



Humanitarian aid from Kuwait to Ukrainian refugees.



KRCS distributes dates in four provinces in Yemen.

that these stuffs are sufficient for a family for a month.

The society also backed the poorest in Yemen, Comoros, the Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, and Pakistan, Malwai, Ghana, Sudan, Senegal, in addition to Palestine, she added. The KRCS further organized a collective Iftar for 1,000 Syrian refugee families in Jordan that was supported by Kuwait Finance House. In addition,

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Abdullah Al-Nuri charitable society signed a support deal worth \$400,000, within the framework of backing the Syrian refugees in Jordan. UNHCR representative to Kuwait Nisreen Rubaian said this is the second deal aims to offer humanitarian aid in cash to more than 2,000 Syrian families. —KUNA

Local



Waleed Al-Khashti with Waleed Al-Jasem and Bibi Al-Khudari



Waleed Al-Khashti with Madhi Al-Khamees and Rashed Al-Halifi.

# Zain hosts Ramadan ghabqa gathering for Kuwaiti media

Company hosts special event in recognition of their role and efforts



KUWAIT: Waleed Al-Khashti delivers his opening speech.



Zain's Corporate Communications and Relations team.

**KUWAIT:** Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, hosted a special Ramadan ghabqa gathering for Kuwaiti media and press representatives as part of its social campaign during the Holy Month of Ramadan. The gathering came in recognition of the media's great role and efforts in serving the nation's information and culture sectors.

The event celebrated the huge role played by press, TV, and radio institutions in the further progress of the nation. Zain strongly believes in the crucial role and powerful effects of the media in raising public awareness, especially during the COVID pandemic the past two years.

The ghabqa gathering was attended by a large number of local and regional media representa-

**Huge info revolution after media entered tech era**

tives, including editors-in-chiefs, press, television stations, radio channels, electronic news platforms, media personalities, video crews, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Information and

Culture. The event featured many entertainment and recreational programs amidst a beautiful Ramadan atmosphere.

During his opening speech, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti said: "We are honored tonight to welcome representatives of Kuwaiti media and press in our special ghabqa, which we host in celebration and recognition of the great role you all play in serving the nation's media scene."

Khashti continued: "Zain is always keen on implementing its media responsibility in line with its comprehensive corporate sustainability and social responsibility strategy. We support media programs and projects that contribute to elevating the cultural scene within the community." Khashti

added: "In the modern age, new terminologies surfaced, such as press technology, which represent tech applications and tools the media rely on to spread, store, and process information."

Khashti noted: "Without a doubt, we now have a huge information revolution after newspapers and media entered the tech publishing era. You are the voice of the people, and your presence affects human behavior. The media is the real indicator on social, economic, and cultural progress."

Zain's Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility campaign during the holy month of Ramadan includes many social and cultural programs, with the aim of celebrating the true spirit the holy month brings as well as helping less fortunate people enjoy Ramadan happily.



Kuwait Times staff attend the ghabqa.



(From left) Hussain Assad, Antoine Abou Khalil and Islam Al-Sharaa



From the ghabqa.



Kuwait Times

Established 1961  
The First Daily in The Arabian GulfTHE LEADING INDEPENDENT  
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF  
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Email: info@kuwaittimes.com  
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KUWAIT: (From left) Chief Executive Officer of REXPO Ahmad Rezal Chan, Ambassador of Tajikistan to Kuwait Dr Zabdullah Zabdov, Ambassador of Malaysia Dato' Mohammad Ali Selamat, and Associate Professor Dato' Dr Mohd Farid Ravi Bin Abdullah, Rector Chief Executive of International Islamic University College of Selangor. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

# Malaysian Embassy hosts 'biggest' education expo

## Malaysia finally open for vaccinated, unvaccinated travelers, says ambassador

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The biggest Education Malaysia Expo (Yes2Malaysia) was held at the Malaysian Embassy with the participation of 19 educational institutions on April 22-23, 2022. Ambassador of Malaysia to Kuwait Dato' Mohammad Ali Selamat expressed his joy in hosting the two-day expo in Kuwait that offer students the best educational institutes that are ranked among the top 200 universities in the world.

"Malaysia is offering degrees that are well-recognized globally, where a total of 35 universities are in the top 600 according to QS World University Rankings 2021. Furthermore, based on QS World University Rankings by Subject 2021, 32 Malaysian programs were placed among the top 100 universities for the study of their academic subjects," he said.

### Malaysian institutes among top 200 worldwide

The ambassador affirmed that reaching Malaysia is easier now after Kuwait Airways announced it would start commercial flights to Kuala Lumpur in June 2022, with triweekly flights on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. He announced that Malaysia has finally reopened for vaccinated and unvaccinated travelers after two years of travel restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic. Also, studying in Malaysia will allow students to visit other neighboring countries such as Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand.

"Malaysia is known for its tagline 'Truly Asia'. It is one of the world's top tourist destinations and has UNESCO World Heritage sites like Mount Kinabalu, Kota Kinabalu National Park, Malacca City and pristine marine parks. It is also one of Southeast Asia's most vibrant economies

that can be the launchpad for your education and career," Ambassador Mohammad Ali Selamat said. He pointed out that Malaysia is one of the top destinations for those seeking an internationally-recognized education, boasting highly-ranked universities.

#### Cultural immersion

In addition to being at the forefront of quality education, its affordable, cosmopolitan cities provide rich cultural immersion, "Kuala Lumpur ranked as the second most affordable student city. Education in Malaysia will provide you with the tools to kickstart your future," the envoy said. Ambassador Mohammad Ali Selamat told Kuwait Times that his country is well-known as a modern, progressive, and Muslim-friendly country with easy access to halal food and contemporary life and facilities, noting that Malaysia's modern and convenient transportation system connects every part of the country.

"Malaysia is known for its friendly community and a melting pot of Asia's diverse communities. Therefore, students can gain a global perspective on working, interacting and living with people from different cultures. This will help in inculcating values like hard work, resilience and tolerance, ultimately creating individuals who can adapt to any environment," the ambassador explained.

Chief Executive Officer of REXPO Ahmad Rezal Chan: "This is the second edition of Yes2Malaysia Expo in Kuwait. Malaysia is a great option for Kuwaiti and expatriate students, because of Malaysia's affordability and quality of education as well as Islamic cultural similarities. The expo this time is a bit unique because it is a fusion expo, where several universities are on digital platforms participating virtually, while others are present in person. Students can scan the QR code and directly talk to them."

Chan added: "Students can have an exclusive counseling and interview session virtually and physically with representatives from Malaysia about education pathway and visa processing procedures." He indicated



Ambassador of Malaysia Dato' Mohammad Ali Selamat.

that among the 19 participating universities, four are approved by Kuwait's Ministry of Higher Education - Universiti of Malaya (UM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). He said free tickets and accommodation were given away to students applying to selected participating universities during the event, along with scholarship opportunities for undergraduate students.

"Malaysia has been named the world's second most affordable student city. This is mainly because the costs of living and tuition fees in the local currency are cheaper compared to the Kuwaiti dinar and other currencies," he added.

Annual tuition fees in Malaysia range from \$4,000 to \$6,000, while living expenses are around \$400 to \$700 per month. Although Malaysia is among nations with the lowest cost of education, students can strike a balance between quality and affordability. Regarding tourism, Kuala Lumpur has historic and touristic attractions along with its rich, diverse culture. Moreover, it is also distinguished as a suitable destination for holidays

throughout the year and is considered the cultural, financial, and economic center of Malaysia.

#### Two million tourists

The Ambassador of Malaysia to Kuwait said that his country is expecting to attract two million tourists this year after lifting travel restrictions. "Tourism is one of the major sources of revenue for the economy, provides a large component of Malaysia's GDP and is a key backer of Malaysian employment."

Concerning trade and investment, Malaysia is a country with a rich history and culture that sits in the heart of Southeast Asia. It is one of the most developed and advanced countries in Asia. With a population of 32 million, a per capita gross domestic product of \$10,600, and an unemployment rate of 4.2 percent, Malaysia has set its sights to reclaim its place as one of the most attractive trade and investment destinations in Asia. The country and its people have bravely overcome the coronavirus outbreak.

As a trading post, Malaysia's history is deeply rooted in the development of Southeast Asia. As early as 1500, the Malacca Sultanate was well known as an important port and trading city for travelers and merchants from China, India and the Arab world. Along with other Southeast Asian and Asian countries, Malaysia has begun implementing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which came into force on January 1, 2022. Known as the biggest free trade zone in history, the RCEP would allow investors to reach out to a market of 2.2 billion people with a combined economic size of \$26 trillion or 30 percent of the global economy.

Malaysia is the 25th most competitive economy according to the World Competitive Yearbook 2021. The country is ranked second in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business for 2020 in dealing with construction permits and has been identified as the most attractive investment destination for 2022 by the Milken Institute in its Global Opportunity Index 2022.



Chief Executive Officer of REXPO Ahmad Rezal Chan stands next to the virtual QR codes of the participated universities.



## KFH honors winners of 'KFH Reciters' competition

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) honored the winners of the "KFH Reciters" competition for the recitation of Holy Quran. The competition was launched during the holy month of Ramadan for the

eighth year respectively. The competition was held specifically for customers holding "Baiti" and Hesabi" accounts by a highly specialized team of highly distinguished reciters in Kuwait led by the honorable Sheikh Fahad Al-Kandari.

Twenty-six winners won prizes worth KD 8,000. They have been honored following the final eliminations made in coordination with a specialized judges committee to implement highly professional and transparent evaluation standards. The participants' abilities and competencies were considered during the competition as they were divided into groups and special

tests were prepared for them according to their levels.

The competition event took place in KFH Auto showroom amidst high participation ratio by contestants. The number of contestants in the final eliminations reached more than 80 finalists for the -25 group (males and females) according to the announced terms and conditions.

The competition enhances the discovery and identification of highly talented competitors in recitation, vocal abilities and memorization. Also, the competition contributes to the enhancement and encouragement of the present generations to read Quran and learn the

recitation rules. Several live episodes were broadcasted on KFH channel on Instagram kfhgroup to test some of the participants in the competition. KFH channels on social media were fully set to answer any queries related to registration and participation in the competition.

KFH Ramadan event this year has targeted all customer segments, while focusing on the youth segment, through certain events comprising sports and social activities. Also, KFH has allocated certain events to encourage SMEs owners who were mostly from the youth category.





Mosque blast kills 33 including children in north Afghanistan

## Ex-Honduran president appears in US court on drugs charges

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FIGEAC: French President and liberal party La Republique en Marche (LREM) candidate for re-election Emmanuel Macron poses with supporters at the end of a rally on the last day of campaigning in Figeac, southern France. —AFP

# France braces for Le Pen-Macron showdown

## Le Pen would become modern France's first far-right leader and first female president

PARIS: France on Saturday prepared to choose between centrist President Emmanuel Macron and far-right challenger Marine Le Pen to rule the country for the next five years after a bitterly contested and polarising election campaign. Macron is the favourite to win re-election in the run-off ballot on Sunday, and there are indications he bolstered his advantage with a combative performance in the one-off election debate against a somewhat defensive Le Pen.

But the president and his allies have insisted over the last week that nothing is in the bag, with a strong turnout crucial to avoid a shock in France comparable to the 2016 polls that led to Brexit in Britain and Donald Trump's election in the United States.

A Le Pen victory would send shockwaves across Europe. Left-wing EU leaders including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz have pleaded with France to choose Macron over his rival. The stakes are huge—Le Pen would become modern France's first far-right leader and first female president. Macron would be the first French president to win re-election in two decades. If elected, Macron is expected, in a symbolic gesture, to address supporters on the Champ de Mars in central Paris at the foot of the Eiffel Tower.

Saturday is marked by a campaign blackout, with no campaigning allowed and no more polls published. Some 48.7 million French are eligible to vote. Polls in mainland France will open at 0600 GMT on Sunday and close 12 hours later, immediately followed by projections that usually predict the result with a degree of accuracy.

### Final campaign flurry

But voters in French overseas territories that span the globe start voting earlier, beginning with those in North America and the Caribbean on Saturday, followed by the Pacific and then the Indian Ocean. The first to have their say in the election were voters in the tiny island territory of Saint Pierre and Miquelon off the northern coast of Canada who began casting ballots at 1000 GMT.

Macron and Le Pen threw themselves into a final flurry of campaigning Friday, firing off attacks in

interviews before last-minute walkabouts and rallies. Le Pen insisted that opinion polls giving Macron the lead would be proved wrong and took aim at her rival's plan to push back the retirement age to 65 from 62.

Macron for his part said Le Pen was trying to mask an authoritarian "extreme right" platform that stigmatises Muslims with a plan to outlaw headscarves in public. But the campaign also had some lighter moments. Macron's quizzical stares during the TV debate and a daringly unbuttoned shirt during a campaigning break that provided a glimpse of his strikingly hairy chest became instant Internet memes. Polls have shown Macron with a lead of some 10 percentage points.

The highly anticipated TV debate did not change the trend and, if anything, allowed Macron to open more of a gap. But result is predicted to be closer than in 2017, when the same candidates faced off but Macron carried the day with 66 percent to 34 percent.

### Turnout 'real risk'

Analysts say abstention rates could reach 26 to 28 percent, with reluctant left-wingers needing to back the president for him to be sure of victory. Spring school holidays will also be in full swing across much of the country this weekend, although the 1969 record for a second-round abstention rate of 31.1 percent is not expected to be beaten.

Far-left leader Jean-Luc Melenchon, who scored a close third-place finish in the first-round vote on April 10, has pointedly refused to urge his millions of followers to back the president while insisting they must not cast a single vote for Le Pen.

According to Martial Foucault, director of the Cevipof political studies centre, the greater the abstention rate the more the gap will narrow between Macron and Le Pen, describing this as a "real risk" for the president. In a final plea, Macron urged voters not to repeat the mistake of those who opposed Brexit and the election of Trump but decided to stay at home. "They woke up the next day with a hangover," he told BFMTV. "We are going to decide the future of the country on April 24 and not the opinion polls on April 22." —AFP



Macron is the favourite to win re-election

## Loyalists turn on Sri Lanka PM as protest pressure grows

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's beleaguered prime minister came under increased pressure to step down on Saturday, as staunch allies broke ranks and backed street protests calling for resignations over a worsening economic crisis. Media minister Nalaka Godahewa announced his support for the thousands outside President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office who are demanding he and other members of his family relinquish power.

Sri Lanka is suffering its most painful economic downturn since independence in 1948, with months of blackouts and acute shortages of food, fuel and other essentials. The crisis has sparked nationwide protests, with angry demonstrators camped outside Rajapaksa's office for more than two weeks.

Under pressure, the president dropped two of his brothers—Chamal and Basil—and nephew Namal from the cabinet this month, but protesters rejected the changes as cosmetic. Godahewa, previously a

staunch Rajapaksa loyalist, said the president should sack his elder brother, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa—the head of the family—and allow an all-party interim government to take over.

He said the government had lost its credibility after the police killing of a protester on Tuesday. Godahewa said he had offered his resignation but President Rajapaksa had not accepted it. "We need to restore political stability to successfully meet the economic crisis," Godahewa said in a statement on his Facebook page.

"The entire cabinet, including the prime minister, should resign and (there should be) an interim cabinet that can win the confidence of all." Several other senior ruling party members, including Dullas Alahapperuma, a former media minister and cabinet spokesman, have asked the premier to step down.

"I urge the president to appoint a smaller cabinet with a genuine consensus representing all parties in parliament for one year maximum," Alahapperuma said Saturday.

But the prime minister rejected their demands, insisting a majority of ruling party lawmakers still supported him. "A majority of MPs want me, there may be a few who want me to go," Mahinda told Neth FM radio. "People must be patient to overcome this crisis," the 76-year-old added, rejecting

rule of Daniel arap Moi.

His rule saw the most violent election in Kenya's history when more than 1,100 people died in bloody ethnic battles after disputed 2007 polls, but he also oversaw the adoption of a new constitution with reforms aimed at preventing such unrest.

Kibaki left a legacy of strong growth in the regional economic powerhouse, launching major infrastructure projects and boosting the struggling health and education sectors. But his rule was also marred by rampant government corruption and his lavish spending on flagship projects contributed to the country's debt mountain. Kibaki had kept a low profile since leaving office, making few public appearances.

Details about his death have not been officially disclosed. However his health had fluctuated since a serious car accident in 2002 and he had been in and out of hospital in recent years. Kenyatta said a state funeral would be held, without giving a date. —AFP



COLOMBO: A policeman stands guard in front of a banner during an ongoing anti-government demonstration near the president's office in Colombo, demanding President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's resignation over the country's crippling economic crisis. —AFP

calls for a unity cabinet. "There cannot be any interim government without me as its prime minister." Police and the military stepped up security in the central town of Rambukkana on Saturday, ahead of the funeral of 42-year-old Chaminda Lakshan, who was shot dead when police broke up a protest against spiralling fuel prices. —AFP



NAIROBI, Kenya: A close-up of the front covers of two Kenyan newspapers, with tributes of former Kenyan president Mwai Kibaki, in Nairobi, on April 23, 2022. Former Kenyan president Mwai Kibaki, who led the East African nation for more than a decade, died on April 22, 2022, his successor Uhuru Kenyatta announced. He was 90. —AFP

## Kenya's former president Kibaki dead at 90

NAIROBI, Kenya: Former Kenyan president Mwai Kibaki, who led the East African nation for more than a decade, has died, his successor Uhuru Kenyatta announced on Friday. He was 90. "It is a sad day for us as a country. We have lost a great leader," Kenyatta said in an address on state television. Kenyan politicians, African leaders, the African Union and former colonial ruler Britain were among those to send their condolences.

Kibaki, a veteran politician whose career dated back to the birth of independent Kenya, served as the country's third president from December 2002 to April 2013, taking over from the authoritarian

## 10 missing in Poland's second mine accident

WARSAW: Rescuers were making their way underground toward 10 miners who went missing on Saturday after a second coal mine accident in just days in Poland. The latest tragedy took place at the Zofiwka mine in southern Poland, when a tremor shook the pit at 3:40 am (0140 GMT), 900 metres below the surface, sparking a methane leak, its owner JSW, said in a statement.

In 2018, five miners were killed when an earthquake struck the same coalmine in the country which relies heavily on the fossil fuel. After Saturday's jolt, 42 of the 52 miners who were underground at the time managed to make it to the surface, the company said.

"Rescuers are without contact with 10 people," JSW added. Twelve rescue teams were trying to reach the spot where the missing miners were thought to be, 2,300-2,500 metres away, the company said. By 1000 GMT they were 600 metres from the spot where the missing miners were thought to be, JSW said. Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki called the accident "devastating" and said he would travel to the scene and that he hoped rescuers would find the missing alive.

JSW is also the owner of a mine in Pniowek some 230 kilometres (140 miles) south, where an accident on Wednesday killed five, including a rescuer, and left seven missing. An initial explosion occurred shortly after midnight on Wednesday at a depth of 1,000 metres.

A second shock the site while rescue workers were helping the victims of the first. The search for the seven people missing was called off on Friday after a third blast made conditions in the pit too dangerous, JSW said. Analysis of the situation "has forced us to abandon the rescue operation undertaken to evacuate the seven miners" still trapped, JSW company chief Tomasz Cudny told reporters on Friday, after a blast ripped through the pit, injuring 10, as rescuers were trying to install a new ventilation duct. "It's a very tough decision," Cudny said. —AFP

## International

## S Africa deadly floods shine spotlight on housing crisis

‘We don’t have homes, this is our home’

**DURBAN, South Africa:** Thulisile Ntobela, once lived in an apartment, but when her rent went up 25 percent, the unemployed mother of five could no longer afford and moved out. She found a piece of vacant land in Durban and put up a shack. That was five years ago and much cheaper than paying rent, which had gone up to 200 rand (\$12.80).

“That’s why we moved here, we don’t pay the rent. You just build your house and you stay,” she said. Hers was among the 87 homes-shacks made of corrugated iron-that vanished in seconds when the ground, over-saturated with flood water-crumbled at the informal settlement of eNkanini, on a hilltop residential area of central Durban.

“I was so scared at that time. I was holding my baby. People were screaming,” recalled the 31-year-old, carrying her youngest, an eight-month-old boy. No one was injured because they had already taken shelter at a neighbour’s home when the floor began to tremble. Once covered in trees, the settlement of eNkanini formed in 2016 is now dotted with hundreds of shacks, some painted in bright colours. “We don’t have homes. This is our home,” said Mzwandile Hlatshwayo, 25, a leader in the community.

Nearly 13 percent of South Africa’s 59 million people live in shacks, locally referred to as informal settlements, according to 2019 government statistics. Hlatshwayo is from a rural area of KwaZulu-Natal but moved to the eastern province’s biggest city Durban in search of work. He would live in government housing, but none is available in the city. “I came here looking for a job. There is no jobs in rural areas,” he said.

## Apartheid legacy

The problem of landlessness goes back to the apartheid era that segregated black Africans and people of colour, preventing them from owning land, said Sbu Zikode, head of the land and housing activism organisation Abahlali baseMjondolo (shack dwellers).

Stripped of land ownership, poor blacks moved to sub-par neighbourhoods. But nearly three decades since the apartheid system was abolished, land distribution and economic inequity remain unresolved. In 1995, the housing backlog was estimated by a UN



Settlements have mushroomed

report to be 1.5 million units. Despite more than three million government houses being constructed since then, the shortfall has ballooned to 3.7 million homes, according to the Centre for Affordable Housing Finance in Africa.

“It’s not by our choice that we have no land, we have no homes,” Zikode said. People have also flocked to urban centres in search of jobs and better



**DURBAN:** Displaced people from an informal settlement of Thuthukani, near Tongaat, receive 1,000 hampers of a hot evening traditional meal of beans and samp delivered by the Disaster Management, inter faith based communities led by the Tongaat Hindu Unity Forum and civic organizations. —AFP

healthcare and education. Infrastructure in municipalities like Durban haven’t kept up with the influx, Zikode said. Informal settlements have mushroomed on vacant land as a result. But communities on more valuable land face eviction, Zikode said, which often turns into violent encounters.

“It is this reason people will occupy land that is not safe. They will occupy land that is along river-

banks, they will occupy land that is along floodplains.” The less desirable locations on floodplains have now also brought deadly consequences. Rescuers searching for the missing have said poor infrastructure with no consideration of the terrain put the houses at greater risk. Many of those still standing in eNkanini are teetering half a metre from the edge of cliffs, vulnerable to future storms. —AFP

## Ex-Honduran president appears in US court on drugs charges

**NEW YORK:** Ex-Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernandez made his first appearance before a US judge Friday following his extradition to America to face drug trafficking charges. The 53-year-old appeared in a New York federal court via video-link after he was brought to the United States on Thursday.

Hernandez is accused of aiding the smuggling of hundreds of tons of cocaine to America in return for millions of dollars in bribes from drug-traffickers. Hernandez was not required to enter a plea during the short hearing. His lawyers did not make a request for bail but said they would at a later date.

Judge Stewart Aaron set a date of May 10 for Hernandez’s arraignment, when the former leader will be expected to say whether he will challenge the charges. Hernandez, whose 2014 to 2022 stint as president was plagued by allegations of corruption, risks spending the rest of his life in prison if convicted.

He is accused of having facilitated the smuggling of some 500 tons of cocaine-mainly from Colombia and Venezuela-to America via Honduras since 2004, starting long before his presidency. In turn, he received “millions of dollars in bribes... from multiple narco-trafficking organizations in Honduras, Mexico and other places,” US prosecutors allege.

Hernandez has been charged with three counts of drug and weapons offenses. Not even three weeks after leaving office following elections, a warrant was issued for his



**NEW YORK:** Honduran opponents to former President Juan Orlando Hernandez protest outside the federal court in Manhattan on April 22, 2022 in New York. —AFP

arrest at Washington’s request, and he surrendered to police on February 15. He was then held at a police special forces prison in the capital Tegucigalpa before he was taken to the US on a Drug Enforcement Administration plane. Hernandez portrayed himself as an ally of the US war on drugs during his tenure, helping to extradite several narcotics kingpins.

Washington even supported his re-election in 2017 despite a constitutional one-term limit and accusations of voting fraud. But several drug traffickers since told US prosecutors they had paid bribes to the president’s inner circle, and by the time he left office, US drug

enforcers were ready to move against Hernandez.

The US says the former president turned Honduras into a “narco-state” by involving the military, police and civilians in drug trafficking to the United States. He is alleged to have received money from traffickers including Mexican drug lord Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman, allowing them to operate with near impunity.

An alleged Hernandez associate, Geovanny Fuentes Ramirez, was sentenced in the United States in February to life in prison and a fine of \$151.7 million for smuggling tons of cocaine with the ex-president’s aid. — AFP

## Guinea junta says ex-leader ‘finally free’

**CONAKRY, Guinea:** Guinea’s ousted president Alpha Conde is “finally free” and can receive visitors, the junta who overthrew him has said. Conde became Guinea’s first democratically elected president in 2010, but the 84-year-old was deposed by army officers last year and replaced by Colonel Mamady Doumbouya.

He was allowed to go to the United Arab Emirates for medical treatment in January, coming back to Guinea on April 10. His party, Rally of the Guinean People (RPG) has said that he was not truly free before or after his trip, and demanded his “total and unconditional freedom.”

To back up its call, the RPG suspended its participation at a junta-organised national reconciliation conference in protest at his detention. A statement by the junta published late Friday said that Doumbouya “informs national and international opinion that the former president of the republic is finally free.”

“While continuing to benefit from adequate protection, he can receive on demand members of his biological and political family, friends and close ones,” it said. The statement said Conde will stay at his wife’s house in the capital Conakry until his own private house is constructed in the suburb of Kipe. —AFP

## ‘Fierce battles’ rage in east...

Continued from Page 1

on Telegram. The Kremlin has claimed the “liberation” of Mariupol, which is pivotal to its war plans, after President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of Russia’s Western-leaning neighbor.

In a phone call to Putin, EU chief Charles Michel appealed for humanitarian access to Mariupol, which has been devastated by weeks of intense Russian bombardment. “Strongly urged for immediate humanitarian access and safe passage from Mariupol and other besieged cities all the more on the occasion of Orthodox Easter,” Michel tweeted. Putin however accused Kyiv of refusing to allow its troops to surrender in Mariupol.

Ukraine says hundreds of its forces and civilians are holed up inside the sprawling Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol, and Kyiv has repeatedly called for a ceasefire to allow civilians to safely exit the shattered city. A Ukrainian presidential adviser, Oleksiy Arestovich, said Saturday that Russian forces had resumed air strikes on the Azovstal factory. “They renewed air strikes on the territory of the plant, on the area of our troops and try to carry out assault operations,” Arestovich said at a briefing.

“Nevertheless, our defenders hold on regardless of the very difficult situation and even carry out counter raids.” Near the frontlines in eastern

Ukraine, a smattering of residents still held out amid frequent bouts of shelling. After two months of sustained Russian artillery fire, the hamlet of Lysychansk, just 14 kilometers from Russian ground forces, has largely turned into a ghost town.

Only a small sheltered market in the centre of town is still operating, providing food and other supplies after the town’s other market was bombed. “Everyone, this is going to end badly,” said an elderly woman in line for vegetables, fearing a targeted strike by Russian forces similar to a deadly train station rocket attack in the nearby town of Kramatorsk on April 8 that killed at least 52 people.

In Severodonetsk, just 10 kilometers from Russian positions, the city’s volunteers and medical personnel continue to hold the fort in a local hospital. Shelling resumed recently, and the city is likely to soon be surrounded by advancing Russian troops. “We will stay here until the last patient,” says Roman Vodnianik, the hospital’s chief, whose office is decorated with Orthodox Christian icons.

Russia’s change of strategic focus to southern and eastern Ukraine saw invading forces leave behind a trail of indiscriminate destruction and civilian bodies around Kyiv, including in the commuter town of Bucha. A United Nations mission to Bucha documented “the unlawful killing, including by summary execution, of some 50 civilians there”, the UN’s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said. Russian forces had “indiscriminately shelled and bombed populated areas, killing civilians and wrecking hospitals, schools and other civilian infrastructure, actions that may amount to war crimes”. — AFP

after Saudi Arabia announced it had executed in just one day a record 81 people convicted of various crimes related to “terrorism”, including men linked to Yemen’s Houthi rebels.

But in early March, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said his country and Iran were “neighbors forever”, and that it was “better for both of us to work it out and to look for ways in which we can coexist”. The comments were welcomed by Iran’s Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian. “We have different views and approaches on some issues in the region, but the management of differences by the sides can serve the interests of the two nations,” Amir-Abdollahian said at the time. — AFP

## Zionists close Gaza crossing...

Continued from Page 1

They followed rocket attacks on Wednesday and Thursday, and came as police clashed with Palestinian protesters at Al-Aqsa mosque, leaving at least one man hospitalized in serious condition. Zionists had retaliated against those attacks with air strikes, but in an apparent desire to prevent further violence, shifted its response this time to the painful economic measure of closing Erez, implying that further rockets would extend the penalty.

“The re-opening of the crossing will be decided in accordance with a security situational assessment,” COGAT added. Employment in Zionist entity

## Themes of the Quran: Stories...

Continued from Page 1

in the Quran is Noah, who spent his long life calling people to worship the one true God, but whose message was rejected except by a few. He was ordered to build the ark, which resulted in even more ridicule from his people. Finally, God saved him and those with him for their belief from the deluge that destroyed an obstinate, defiant, sinful people.

Other prophets include Jacob, Joseph, David and Solomon, as well as Job, Jonah, and Lot, all whose stories are interspersed throughout the Quran. Each had extraordinary gifts or events associated with their names, but the essence of each story is the same: they exclusively worshipped the Creator of the universe, and invited others to share the blessings of the wholesome way of life ordained by God. For their sincerity and persistence, they earned status with God, who has made them examples for all believers to follow.

Jesus the son of the virgin Mary is mentioned 183 times in the Quran in verses that present his story from conception to Resurrection, when he will be asked by God, “Did you say unto men, ‘Worship me and my mother as two gods besides Allah?’ He will reply, ‘Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which

is a lifeline for people in Gaza, where according to a recent World Bank report nearly half of the 2.3 million population is unemployed. There are currently 12,000 Gazans with work permits in Zionist entity, with the government recently announcing its intention to add another 8,000.

More than 200 people, mostly Palestinians, have been hurt in clashes in and around Al-Aqsa in the past week. Palestinians have been outraged by massive Zionist police deployment and repeated visits by Jews to the holy site.

Early on Friday, the Palestinian Red Crescent said 57 people were wounded after police stormed the compound in annexed Jerusalem’s Old City when Palestinians began hurling stones towards the Western Wall, the holiest site where Jews can pray. And after midday prayers, some Muslim worshippers chanted “incitement” and tried to damage a police post, police said, using a drone to spray tear gas from the air, AFP reporters said. — AFP

I have no right... I said not to them except what You commanded me - to worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.” (5:116-117). Details of his birth, message to the Children of Israel, and ascension to God correct misconceptions that have been passed on for generations.

Other prophets mentioned in association with Jesus are his uncle Zachariah and his cousin John. Finally, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), is described in the Quran as “the Messenger of Allah and the seal of the prophets” (33:40). Although he is mentioned only four times by name, his story is understood by the many verses that are addressed to him, directing him in the many situations that unfolded in his lifetime.

From these verses, we follow events that have shaped the Muslim community ever since. But his message was not only for his community in Mecca and Medina. The Quran says, “And We have sent thee not but as a mercy for all peoples” (21:108). If you would like to meet the elite of mankind - the prophets of God mentioned by Him - just pick up a translation of the Quran. You will be in the best of company.

*Courtesy of the TIES Center: As one of the projects funded and managed by Kuwaiti Society for Cultural Dialogue, TIES aims at empowering Kuwait’s expats through social and educational services that promote a positive and productive role in society, and to facilitate opportunities for intra- and interfaith interactions that promote social solidarity. For more information, please call 25231015/6 or e-mail: info@tiescenter.net.*

## Iran-Saudi talks resume...

Continued from Page 1

“It is expected that a joint meeting between the foreign ministers of the two countries will be held in the near future,” Nour said, describing what it called the “positive atmosphere of the recent meeting, which raised the hopes of a resumption of bilateral relations”. In March, Iranian media reported that Tehran had suspended participation in talks

## International

# Mosque blast kills 33 including children in north Afghanistan

## A string of bombings rocked the country this week

**KUNDUZ, Afghanistan:** A bomb blast ripped through a mosque during Friday prayers in northern Afghanistan, killing 33 people including children, just a day after the Islamic State group claimed two separate deadly attacks.

Since Taliban fighters seized control of Afghanistan last year after ousting the US-backed government, the number of bombings has fallen but the jihadist and Sunni IS has continued with attacks against targets they see as heretical. A string of bombings rocked the country this week, with deadly attacks targeting a school and a mosque in Shiite neighbourhoods. Taliban government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid tweeted that children were among the 33 dead in the blast on Friday at a mosque in the northern province of Kunduz.

"We condemn this crime... and express our deepest sympathies to the bereaved," he said, adding 43 more were wounded. An intelligence official said on condition of anonymity that the explosion was caused by a bomb, but it was unclear how it was detonated.

An AFP correspondent saw large holes blown through the walls of the Mawlawi Sikandar mosque, popular with Sufis in the Imam Sahib district, north of Kunduz city.

One side of the mosque was completely destroyed by the explosion.

Jihadist groups such as IS bear a deep hatred for Sufis who they view as heretics and accuse them of polytheism — the greatest sin in Islam — for seeking the intercession of dead saints.

"The sight at the mosque was horrifying. All those who were worshipping inside the mosque were either injured or killed," Mohammad Esah, a

shopkeeper who helped ferry victims to the district hospital, told AFP. "I saw 20 to 30 bodies," another local resident said.

### 'Shrapnel injuries'

Relatives of victims arrived at the local hospital to look for their loved ones. "My son is martyred," screamed one man, while a woman accompanied by her four children searched for her husband.

A nurse told AFP over the phone that between 30 to 40 people had been admitted for treatment of wounds from the blast.

About a dozen ambulances ferried the seriously wounded to the main provincial hospital in Kunduz city. "The shrapnel injuries on the bodies of the wounded show they were caused by a bomb explosion," a doctor at the provincial hospital told AFP.

Friday's blast was one of the biggest attacks since the Taliban seized power on August 15 last year. The deadliest was just days later when more than 100 Afghan civilians and 13 US servicemen were killed in a suicide attack at Kabul airport as tens of thousands were trying to flee the country.

IS claimed responsibility for that attack. The regional IS branch in Sunni-majority Afghanistan has repeatedly targeted Shiites and minorities like Sufis, who follow a mystical branch of Islam. IS is a Sunni Islamist group like the Taliban, but the two are bitter rivals. The biggest ideological difference between the two is that the Taliban sought only an Afghanistan free of foreign forces, whereas IS wants an Islamic caliphate stretching from Turkey to Pakistan and beyond.

IS claimed a bombing at a Shiite mosque in the

said publicly," Beijing announced this week it had signed the undisclosed security pact with Honiara. A draft of the pact shocked countries in the region when it was leaked last month, particularly measures that would allow Chinese naval deployments to the Solomons, which are located less than 2,000 kilometres (1,200 miles) from Australia.

Sogavare says his government signed the deal with "eyes wide open", but declined to tell parliament when the signed version will be made public, and his public assurances have done little to ease concerns in Washington and Canberra.

### 'Enormous pressure'

Too late to stop the security deal with China, the White House said its diplomatic delegation was visiting Fiji, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands this week to "ensure our partnerships deliver prosperity, security and peace across the Pacific Islands and the Indo-Pacific".

The US diplomatic team landed in Honiara just three days after the security pact with China was announced. During a 90-minute meeting with Sogavare and two dozen members of his cabinet and senior staff, the US officials discussed expedited opening of a US embassy, health care assistance, vaccine deliveries and increased "people-to-people ties," the White House said.

The delegation also met with opposition leaders and religious leaders. Krittenbrink tweeted that he and Campbell had honoured those lost during the Guadalcanal campaign in World War II.

Meanwhile, China's envoy Li Ming attended a ceremony with Sogavare to hand over an elite running track, which is part of a China-funded national stadium complex reportedly worth US\$53 million.

The facility will host the 2023 Pacific Games—the first time the event has been staged in the history of the Solomons, where many of the 800,000 citizens live in poverty.

## US warns China's military presence in Solomon Islands

**HONIARA, Solomon Islands:** US officials visiting the strategic Solomon Islands on Friday warned of serious repercussions if China were to establish a permanent military presence there after the Pacific nation signed a defence pact with Beijing.

A White House delegation in the capital Honiara delivered the stern warning on the same day that China's ambassador attended an event with Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare—a sign of the importance both nations are according to the small island state.

The United States and Australia—the Pacific nation's traditional allies—are deeply suspicious of the defence deal, fearing it may give China a military foothold in the South Pacific. The White House said the officials had told Sogavare that the recently signed pact has "potential regional security implications" for Washington and its allies.

"If steps are taken to establish a de facto permanent military presence, power-projection capabilities, or a military installation, the delegation noted that the United States would then have significant concerns and respond accordingly," the White House said in a statement. National Security Council Indo-Pacific Coordinator Kurt Campbell and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Krittenbrink led the delegation, which also included Pentagon officials.

According to the White House statement, "Sogavare reiterated his specific assurances that there would be no military base, no long-term presence, and no power projection capability, as he has

## Korean leaders exchange friendly letters despite rising tensions

**SEOUL, South Korea:** North Korean leader Kim Jong Un thanked the South's outgoing president Moon Jae-in for his efforts to improve inter-Korean relations. Pyongyang and Seoul said Friday, in an unexpected move following signs the isolated state could resume nuclear testing. The North has carried out more than a dozen weapons tests so far this year, the latest one just last week—a short-range launch that state media claimed would enhance the "efficiency in the operation of tactical nukes".

The dovish Moon held three summits with Kim and helped facilitate talks between former US president Donald Trump and the North Korean leader. But Kim and Trump's nuclear negotiations ended in failure in 2019 due to disagreements on sanctions relief and what North Korea would be willing to give up in return. Since then, Pyongyang has labelled Moon a "meddlesome mediator", blown up a \$15-million joint liaison office north of the border that was financed by Seoul, and last month test-fired an ICBM at full range for the first time since 2017.

But on Friday Pyongyang's official KCNA news agency said Kim and Moon agreed that inter-Korean ties would improve if both sides "make tireless efforts with hope", despite "the difficult situation so far". In his letter, Kim also said his "historic" summits with Moon gave the people "hope for the future", the KCNA report added.

The North Korean leader "appreciated the pains

and effort taken by Moon Jae-in for the great cause of the nation until the last days of his term of office", the report said, adding the duo's letter exchange was an "expression of their deep trust".

Seoul's presidential Blue House confirmed the two had exchanged friendly letters, adding Moon told Kim that despite the "disappointing moments", together they have made a "clear step" in "changing the fate of the Korean peninsula". Moon also told Kim in his letter that their inter-Korean summits should become the "foundation for unification", and that he hoped for the swift resumption of the stalled dialogue between North Korea and the United States.

### No substance

The letter exchange comes as experts warn of recent signs of new activity at a key nuclear testing site, while Moon's hawkish successor, president-elect Yoon Suk-yeol, has vowed to take a harder line against Kim's provocations. Pyongyang's "military threats towards Seoul and frequent rejection of engagement efforts reflect poorly on trust and prospects for cooperation between the two Koreas," Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, told AFP. But "Pyongyang at least needed to acknowledge the end of Moon's presidency," he added, and that the North seems to be "using the occasion to express expectations that Yoon will inherit inter-Korean agreements."

Some analysts said it was "questionable" whether



**MAZAR-I-SHARIF:** A wounded Afghan man receives treatment at a hospital after he got injured in a bomb blast at the Shiite Seh Dokan Mosque in Mazar-i-Sharif. —AFP

northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif on Thursday that killed at least 12 people and wounded 58 more. The Taliban say they have arrested the "mastermind" of the attack. They also claimed a separate attack in Kunduz city on Thursday, which killed four people and wounded 18.

### Challenge facing Taliban

No group has yet to claim twin blasts on a boys' school in a Shiite neighbourhood of Kabul on Tuesday, which killed six and wounded more than

25. Shiite Afghans, who are mostly from the Hazara community, make up between 10 and 20 percent of Afghanistan's population of 38 million.

Taliban officials insist their forces have defeated IS, but analysts say the jihadist group is a key security challenge. "Since the Taliban took power, the only achievement that they are proud of is the improvement in security," said Hekmatullah Hekmat, an independent political and security expert. "If that is not sustained and if they fail to restrain IS, then they will also be a failure like the previous government." —AFP



**HONIARA:** National Security Council's Indo-Pacific coordinator Kurt Campbell (front L) leaves after a meeting with the Solomon Islands opposition leader Mathew Wale (C) in Honiara. —AFP

"On behalf of the Chinese government and people of China, we congratulate the government of the Solomon Islands," Li said, as he delivered the latest investment lavished by Beijing on a Pacific nation. Sogavare's government severed ties with Taiwan in September 2019 in favour of diplomatic relations with China, unlocking investment but stoking inter-island rivalries. Last November, protests against Sogavare's rule sparked violent riots in the capital, during which much of the city's Chinatown was torched. While the unrest was partly fuelled by poverty and unemployment, anti-China sentiment was also cited as playing a role.

When asked about China's influence in the Pacific, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison told reporters Friday that Beijing was exerting "enormous pressure" on leaders of Pacific island nations. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian in turn accused "Australian politicians" of "coercive diplomacy" in the region. —AFP



**PYONGYANG:** This picture taken on April 13, shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (centre R) and veteran North Korean news anchor Ri Chun Hi (center-L) visiting the Pothong Riverside terraced residential district during its inauguration ceremony in Pyongyang. —AFP

the letter exchange had any substance, given the North's unprecedented blitz of sanctions-busting military provocations this year. "It would have been meaningful if Moon sent Kim an assertive message that nuclear tests will not be acceptable," Cheong Seong-chang, a senior researcher at the private Sejong Institute, told AFP.

"Kim also sent a warm personal letter to President Moon back in September 2020, but it did not lead to improvement in inter-Korean relations." South Korean officials have said Pyongyang could stage a military parade or carry out a weapons test on or around April 25, the anniversary of the founding of the North Korean army. The conservative president-elect Yoon's term begins on May 10. —AFP

## The International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace

*Speech of His Excellency/Elkhan Gahraman Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan*

I would like to note that, within the framework of the 73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2018, the date of 24 April was established as the "International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace" initiated by Azerbaijan and the Non-Aligned Movement's member states.

According to the document, starting from the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly, 24 April will be marked as the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace in the World.

The document states that this international day is a means of promoting UN values, and confirms the importance of the confidence of different peoples to the principles and goals set out in its charter, and in the same time the actuality of efforts to achieve a common goal for a stable and lasting peace through multilateralism, international law and diplomacy.

The initiative came at a time when global multilateral efforts are under the influence of unresolved conflicts, climate change, growing inequality, intolerance and other threats. The values of multilateralism and international cooperation play an important role in promoting peace and security, development and the promotion of human rights, which are important steps for the United Nations. Multilateralism allows sovereign states to respond to security and development threats that they cannot solve alone.

In recent years, the importance of the principle of multilateralism in the system of international relations has increased significantly, because there is no other alternative to regional peace and security. The context of multilateral diplomacy itself is regulated by international law.

"April 24 - International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace" was established at a time when our planet needs it. I think that the countries must find a way out of the problems by joint cooperation. The best way is to expand cooperation with international organizations. There must be commitment to the principle of multilateralism. As an approach there is no good example like multiculturalism.

Azerbaijan has been chairing the Non-Aligned Movement since 2019. During its chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement, Azerbaijan has worked tirelessly to enrich the Movement's role and prestige as an anti-war and peace-loving force, a force that promotes, protects and strengthens multilateralism with the United Nations. During its chairmanship, Azerbaijan actively continued its work to promote the basic principles of the Non-Aligned Movement, increase its effectiveness, as well as strengthen unity and cooperation between member states.

The 60th anniversary of the Non-Aligned Movement will soon be celebrated. During its 60 years of existence, the Non-Aligned Movement has proved itself as one of the key players in the system of international relations, promoting diplomacy for multilateralism and peace. It is no coincidence that at the initiative of the Non-Aligned Movement member states, the UN General Assembly declared the closing date of the Bandung Conference of April 24, 1955, the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace.

I would like to note that Kuwait is one of the countries actively represented in the Non-Aligned Movement, and the relations between Azerbaijan and Kuwait are at a high level within the Non-Aligned Movement, as in other international organizations. Thus, in the international organizations of which we are members, there is always mutual cooperation between our countries, both unilaterally and multilaterally.

# Business

SUNDAY, APRIL 24, 2022

## Losing Russian energy would weigh on Europe's economy: IMF official

### European governments told to reduce consumption to build up inventory

WASHINGTON: Europe can get by without Russian gas for six months, but beyond that, the economic impact would be severe, a senior IMF official told AFP. Alfred Kammer, head of the IMF's European Department, urged countries in the region to take a series of steps to ease the blow, including reducing consumption to build up inventory.

The region relies on Russia for the vast majority of its energy needs, especially natural gas, and IMF economists looked at the economic cost of losing Moscow's supply. "Over the first six months, Europe can deal with such a shut off (by) having alternative supplies (and) using existing storage," he said in an interview on the sidelines of the spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank.



WASHINGTON, US: Director of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) European Department, Alfred Kammer, poses outside of IMF headquarters during the IMF World Bank spring meetings April 22, 2022, in Washington. —AFP

"However, if that gas shut off were to last into the winter, and over a longer period, then that would have significant effects" on the European economy, he said. Western countries have considered putting an embargo on Russian energy in retaliation for its invasion of Ukraine, while Moscow could also shut off exports to hit back at the damaging sanctions already imposed on the government.

The International Monetary Fund projects that a total loss of Russian gas and oil supplies could cost the European Union three percent of GDP, depending on the severity of the winter. He called for steps to prepare for the possibility. "There is no single option, which has a large impact, but lots of smaller measures will have a larger impact," he said, including by finding alternative suppliers, which some countries already have begun to do.

#### No recession

Consumers also have an important role to play and governments can raise awareness among their population through "public campaigns to reduce energy consumption." "The consumer can act now," he said, and reducing consumption means more fuel can be stored in case supplies are interrupted. Although the war in Ukraine has slowed growth sharply, Kammer said it "will not derail the recovery" and he does not expect a Europe-wide recession.

The major eurozone economies, with the exception of Spain, will be "weak in 2022" and will see a quarter or two of near-zero growth or even a technical recession with two negative quarters. But the IMF expects these economies to recover in the second half of this year.

#### 'A boon'

The Russian attack on its neighbor also has caused a flood of about five million refugees, creating a challenge for European countries which face strains on their budgets as they deal with the influx. Poland, which has taken in the most Ukrainians, is particularly affected. What happens to those people, mostly women and children, after the war remains a question. "Some of these refugees will stay in Europe, I'm sure about that," said Kammer, who noted, that could be "a boon" for countries faced with an aging population and a lack of workers. "But it could be a bad for Ukraine if too many of the refugees are going to stay." —AFP

## Lagarde sees 'strong likelihood' of ECB rate hike

FRANKFURT: If the wave of inflation gripping the eurozone doesn't abate, ECB chief Christine Lagarde said on Friday she sees "a strong likelihood" that the bank will hike rates before 2022 ends. European countries have seen prices rise after the pandemic drastically disrupted supply chains, and the situation grew worse starting in late February after Russia invaded Ukraine, causing a spike in energy and food prices. While central banks worldwide have started tightening borrowing costs to fight inflation as the impact from the war in Ukraine spread, the Frankfurt-based bank has refused to do the same, despite pressure to do so.

In an interview on CNBC, Lagarde said central bankers will be watching inflation expectations, wages and other indicators, but. "If the situation continues, as predicated at the moment, there is a strong likelihood that rates will be hiked before the end of the year. How much how many times remains to be seen and will be data dependent." She also said the bank would likely end its asset purchase program meant to support the economy during the pandemic "in the course of the third quarter with a high probability that it will be early in the quarter." Eurozone inflation hit a record 7.5 percent in March, above the central bank's medium-term target of two percent. —AFP



Net Income

47

Million KD



Customers



Revenue



EBITDA



EPS

Q1 2022 results

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A Wonderful World



Business

# French prosecutors issue international arrest warrant for Nissan ex-boss Ghosn

Ghosn faces charges of misuse of company assets, money laundering and corruption

NANTERRE, France: French authorities have issued an international arrest warrant for disgraced former Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn, who has lived in Lebanon since his daring getaway from Japan in 2019.

The warrant, issued on Thursday, relates to suspect payments of some 15 million euros (\$16.3 million) between the Renault-Nissan alliance that Ghosn once headed and its dealer in Oman, Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), prosecutors told AFP on Friday. The allegations against Ghosn, 68, include misuse of company assets, money laundering and corruption. The auto tycoon—who holds French, Lebanese and Brazilian passports—was initially due to stand trial in Japan, following his detention there in 2018, but he jumped bail and fled to Lebanon.

The international arrest warrant issued on Thursday by a court in the Paris suburb of Nanterre is a strong message to Lebanon, which does not extradite its citizens and has banned Ghosn from leaving its territory. If the warrant is carried out, Ghosn will be summoned before a judge in Nanterre and formally indicted.

The French probe centers on suspect financial dealings between Renault-Nissan's Dutch subsidiary RNBV and SBA, consultancy work involving RNBV and a former government minister, and lavish parties organized at the Versailles Palace in France.

One of Ghosn's lawyers, Jean Tamalet, told AFP the French warrant was "very surprising because the investigating judge and the Nanterre prosecutor know perfectly well that Carlos Ghosn, who has always cooperated with justice, is subject to a judicial ban on leaving Lebanese territory". The investigating judge in Nanterre has also issued arrest warrants for the SBA company founder, his two sons and the former director-general, sources close to the case told AFP. The four are suspected of corruption and money laundering. SBA founder Suhail Bahwan "formally denies having taken any part in the offenses covered by the arrest warrant", his lawyer, Christophe Ingrain, told AFP.

**'Major development'**

Renault, which is a civil party in the case, said it "took note" of the Nanterre prosecutors' move.

"This is a major development which can be explained in part by the severity of new information that has come to light ... concerning hidden financial dealings worth several million euros between Carlos Ghosn and SBA's founders and bosses," Renault



JOUNIEH, Lebanon: In this file photo taken on September 29, 2020 former Nissan Motor Co Chairman Carlos Ghosn speaks during a press conference with the President of Lebanon's University of Kaslik (USEK). —AFP

lawyer Kami Haeri told AFP.

The Ghosn saga has grabbed headlines worldwide. In November 2018, Ghosn—then boss of Nissan and head of an alliance between Renault, Nissan and Mitsubishi Motors—was detained in Japan on suspicion of financial misconduct along with his top aide, Greg Kelly. They both denied wrongdoing.

In December 2019 as he awaited trial, Ghosn was smuggled out of Japan on a private jet, hidden in an audio equipment case, and flown to Beirut.

He justified his escape to Lebanon by saying he did not believe he would get a fair trial in Tokyo.

Ghosn also accused Nissan of colluding with prosecutors to have him arrested in a "palace coup" because he had sought to strengthen the Japanese firm's alliance with Renault.

In 2020 Interpol issued a "red notice", advising Beirut that Ghosn was a fugitive from Japan and was wanted by the Tokyo authorities for prosecution. Lebanon, which has no extradition treaty with Japan, has not arrested him. He is respected in Lebanon for his entrepreneurial skills and gives lectures at the Saint-Esprit de Kaslik University near Beirut. But he remains discreet and steers clear of commenting on the country's political and economic upheavals.

French officials have twice travelled to Beirut in the course of their investigations, questioning Ghosn in 2021. Meanwhile, his former aide Kelly was last month handed a six-month suspended sentence by a Tokyo court over allegations he helped Ghosn attempt to conceal income. —AFP

## UK retail sales sink on cost of living crisis: Data

LONDON: British retail sales sank in March as shoppers tightened their belts in the face of a growing cost-of-living crisis, official data showed Friday. Total sales volumes dropped 1.4 percent last month after a drop of 0.5 percent in February, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

However, overall sales held above their pre-pandemic level. "Retail sales fell back notably in March with rises in the cost of living hitting consumers' spending," said ONS economic statistics head Darren Morgan. "Online sales were hit particularly hard due to lower levels of discretionary spending."

Motor fuel sales fell "substantially" as some people curbed non-essential journeys in the face of surging prices at the petrol pumps, he added. Food sales also slid for the fifth consecutive month. Britain's annual inflation rate is at its highest level in three decades, largely on sky-high energy prices.

Costs are surging worldwide after economies reopened from COVID lockdowns and on fallout from the war in Ukraine. British households faced another sharp squeeze on living costs this month after the government ramped up tax on UK workers and businesses.

Sharp price rises are forcing central banks to hike interest rates, in turn curbing recovery from the pandemic. The Bank of England in March lifted its key rate to 0.75 percent, its third increase in a row. The BoE is seeking to tackle high inflation but avoid recession, Governor Andrew Bailey said Thursday.

"We are in a period of unprecedentedly large shocks," Bailey noted. "We are walking a very tight line between inflation and the risk that we could create a recession." "Real income shock will cause slowdown in growth."

UK inflation spiked to 7.0 percent last month—far above the BoE's official 2.0-percent target—eroding the purchasing power of wages.

Meanwhile, the pound slumped more than one percent against the dollar Friday after official data showed tumbling retail sales as Britons grapple with a cost-of-living crisis. In London morning deals, sterling sank to \$1.2887 — its lowest level since October 2020, also as Prime Minister Boris Johnson comes under renewed political pressure. London's benchmark FTSE



LONDON: A pedestrian walks past a board indicating exchange currencies between the sterling, the US dollar and euros, in Central London on April 22, 2022. —AFP

100 index was down 0.5 percent, as shares in retailers fell sharply on the data.

News that UK retail sales had plunged by 1.4 percent in March could put the brakes on the Bank of England's policy of hiking interest rates to curb soaring inflation. Britain's currency has strengthened recently after the BoE hiked interest rates three times in a row.

"Until we get some further clarity on what the Bank of England might do next month ... the pound could well remain under pressure," said CMC Markets analyst Michael Hewson. —AFP

## THE WAY FORWARD

KIPCO's 2022 Shafafiyah (Transparency) Forum will take place after the company's General Assembly meeting.

The event will be broadcast live on the company's website kipco.com at 12:30 p.m. on Monday, April 25, 2022.

KIPCO will present a review of 2021 and guidance for 2022 to shareholders and institutional investors.

KIPCO's 2021 Annual Report, Financial Statements and Corporate Governance Report can be found on the company's website.

We invite shareholders to update their contact information by calling 2294 3477 or sending an email to kipco.ir@kipco.com



Business



Sheikh Sabah Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem, Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem and Japanese Ambassador



Yousuf Al-Ghosain, French Ambassador and Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri



Algerian Ambassador, Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri, Cyprus Ambassador and Libyan Ambassador



Indian Ambassador, Tunisian Ambassador, Iraqi Ambassador and Deputy Canadian Ambassador



Australian Ambassador, Canadian Ambassador and Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri



Yousuf Al-Ghusain, Qais Al-Jouan, Oman Ambassador and Sheikh Mubarak Sabah Al-Malek

# Reconnaissance Research hosts 20 diplomats and ambassadors at Ramadan Diwaniya

Al-Anjeri: Ramadan Diwaniya, a unique Kuwaiti tradition and an opportunity for frank and dynamic discussion



Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem and Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri

KUWAIT: In a festive Ramadan atmosphere, Reconnaissance Research hosted ambassadors and representatives of diplomatic missions at its Diwaniya in Kuwait City. The center's Founder and CEO, Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri said: "As a unique Kuwaiti tradition, the Diwaniya is always given much attention by foreign ambassadors and diplomats. This event in particular was an opportunity for them to openly communicate with the center's members, board of advisors and guests about a host of issues in the center's well-established context of frank and dynamic discussion that avoids the stagnation of diplomatic formality."

"The Diwaniya witnessed various vibrant discussions about local and international affairs and eventually culminated in a brainstorming session that will produce a number of future activities and programs with diplomatic missions and local bodies," he added.



Hussam Marafi and Spanish Ambassador

As for the level of attendees in the event, the center's Deputy CEO, Yousuf Al-Ghusain said: "This unprecedented diplomatic presence in a civil society organization is a source of honor and appreciation to the center and its staff, which makes us carry on our endeavors to bring people closer by means of building more bridges of communication between Kuwait and the world, while

continuously serving as an independent platform for transparent and honest dialogue."

Apart from the center's CEO and his deputy, the attendees included Reconnaissance's members; Qais Al-Jouan, Hussam Marafi, Ali Zalzal, Naser Borseli, accredited ambassadors of 20 countries and a host of prominent public figures.



Advisor to Chinese Ambassador, Chinese Charge d'Affaires and Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri



Sudanese Ambassador and Sheikh Jaber Faisal Al-Saud



Nora-Elise Beck, Head of NATO Office and Qais Al-Jouan



Hussam Ali Marafi, Ali Al-Zalzal and Abdallah Najeeb Al-Mulla.



Dr. Matar Al-Hamly, Ahmad Al-Radaan, Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri, Sheikh Yousuf Abdallah Al-Sabah and Yousuf Al-Ghosain



First Secretary at Japanese Embassy, Mohammed Al-Zoubi, Second Secretary at the Japanese Embassy and Abdallah Al-Khanji.



Sheikh Jaber Faisal Al-Saud Al-Sabah, Yousuf Al-Ghusain and Hussam Al-Rasheed.



Advisor to Iraqi Ambassador, Abdulaziz Tariq Al-Rasheed and Advisor to French Ambassador



Head of Real Estate Union Ibrahim Al-Awadhi and Head of Medical Services at MOD Sheikh Dr Abdallah Mishal Al-Sabah.



Dakhil Al-Dakhil and Naser Borseli



Sheikh Dr Abdallah Mishal Al-Sabah, Dr Mohammad Al-Faily and Ali Al-Zalzal.

Business

# Sri Lanka minister warns crisis will worsen as inflation hits record high

## IMF bailout may take months; Colombo seeks \$2.5b in crisis aid

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's unprecedented shortages of food, fuel and vital medicines will worsen before an international bailout is negotiated, its finance minister warned Friday as inflation hit another record high. Ali Sabry, who is in Washington for talks with international lenders, said an IMF bailout may take months, but he was seeking about \$2.5 billion in emergency assistance from others.

"It is going to get worse before it gets better," Sabry told reporters in an online press conference. "It is going to be a painful few years ahead." However, he added that he was optimistic Sri Lanka could "come out of this strong and we may not even have to go for an IMF program ever again." His remarks came as official data showed Sri Lanka's inflation hit a record high for the sixth consecutive month as the country was gripped by shortages never experienced before.

The statistics office said the broad-based National Consumer Price Index (NCPI) rose 21.5 percent year-on-year in March, more than four times the 5.1 percent inflation of a year earlier. Food inflation in March stood at a whopping 29.5 percent, the highest ever. The figures are likely to rise further: the state-run oil company has subsequently raised the price of diesel, commonly used in public transport, by 64.2 percent. The worsening economic woes has led to clashes at nationwide demonstrations calling on

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to step down over mismanagement and corruption.

Sri Lanka tapped the International Monetary Fund this week for emergency assistance, but was told that its external debt was "unsustainable" and must be "restructured" before any help.

"Approval of an IMF-supported program for Sri Lanka would require adequate assurances that debt sustainability will be restored," the IMF said. The government last week announced a default on its external debt and said precious foreign exchange will be reserved to finance essential food and medicines.

### 'Worst financial crisis'

Sabry said he admitted to the IMF that Sri Lanka's recent economic blunders in slashing taxes worsened the crisis and that Colombo should have sought its help much earlier. "We have accepted our mistakes... There is no denying the fact that we are facing the worst financial crisis in the history of our country," he said. Sabry added that Colombo will move for debt restructuring as demanded by the IMF and in the meantime tap neighbouring India for more credit lines to import fuel and other essentials. He was also hopeful of getting "about \$500 million" from the World Bank to import food and cooking gas within the next four months, he said.



COLOMBO: In this picture taken on April 21, 2022, a pharmacist arranges medicine boxes at a local drug store in Colombo, Sri Lanka used to import around 85 percent of its pharmaceutical supplies but is suffering its worst economic crisis since 1948. — AFP

Sri Lanka will also turn to other key bilateral lenders - China and Japan - to address the crisis of widespread discontent. Police clashed with protesters in central Sri Lanka on Tuesday, killing one of them and wounding nearly 30. At least eight people have also died waiting in long lines for fuel in the past six

weeks. The country's foreign exchange shortage has led to a slowing down of imports, including essentials.

Shops have rationed the quantity of rice, milk powder, sugar, lentils and tinned fish sold to consumers. Sri Lanka's economy has collapsed since the onset of the pandemic, with a nosedive in tourism revenue as well as foreign worker remittances. — AFP

## Gulf Bank names Meslet as winner of new Mercedes Benz G500

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has announced Hajar Meslet Fahad Ali as the winner of the Mercedes-Benz G500 car, taking home the prize for the second Salary Account draw for the year 2022. The draw took place on April 11, 2022 under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Industry, and Ernst and Young.

In keeping with its commitment to rewarding its customers and fulfilling customers' dreams, Gulf Bank's Salary Account customers are enrolled in six scheduled draws throughout the year - with three draws for the chance to win 12 times their salary and three draws for the chance to win a Mercedes-Benz G500 car. On this occasion, Mohammed Al-Qattan, the General Manager for Consumer Banking, stated: "We would like to congratulate Hajar Meslet on becoming the first winner of our three Mercedes-Benz G500 car prizes allocated to Kuwaiti Salary Account clients in 2022."

Al-Qattan wished all Gulf Bank clients the best of luck in the Bank's upcoming Salary Account draws, of which four are set to take place before the end of the year. Al-Qattan noted that Gulf Bank's Salary Account is the only account in Kuwait that has special offers designed especially for each customer's needs, a testament to Gulf Bank's commitment in rewarding customers and fulfilling their dreams. Al-Qattan added: "Gulf Bank's prizes and draws from Gulf Bank are boundless, and customers always have multiple opportunities to take home draw prizes throughout the year."

He added: "Salary Account customers also receive a

cash gift of up to KD 1,000 and a free credit card for 2 years upon opening an account. Additionally, customers also have the chance to apply for an interest-free consumer loan up to KD 25,000 or a housing loan up to KD 70,000 (provided the loan period does not exceed 15 years)." Al-Qattan added that Gulf Bank provides special offers for Kuwaiti employees that work in the government sector. Employees can opt to receive a cash gift up to KD 1,000 or an interest-free loan up to KD 25,000 (provided loan installments do not exceed 40 percent of their salaries, and customers can settle the loan within 5 years, with the option of postponing loan installments for 6 months). Customers can also apply for a free credit card for a period of two years.

Al-Qattan also noted that Kuwaitis who work in the military sector can choose between a cash gift up to KD 1,000 or an interest-free loan of up to KD 25,000 (provided loan installments do not exceed 40% of their salaries, and customers can settle the loan within 5 years), or an interest-free car loan of up to KD 25,000 (for a period of 5 years). Customers can also apply for a

free credit card for a period of two years. Al-Qattan concluded his statement by saying: "All Salary Account customers who transferred their salaries to Gulf Bank between the years 2020, 2021, and 2022 are eligible to enter this year's draw for a chance to win 12 times their salaries." Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties to achieve it.



Gulf Bank management team with the winner of the new Mercedes-Benz in front of the car

## Indonesia to ban palm oil exports to tackle domestic shortage

JAKARTA: Indonesia will ban exports of palm oil starting next week, its president said Friday, as the world's biggest producer faces a shortage of cooking oil made from the product. The Southeast Asian archipelago has been running low on palm-based cooking oil since November as producers turn to exports to cash in on an increase in prices around the world.

Authorities now fear the scarcity and soaring prices could provoke social tensions and have moved to secure supplies. "The government will prohibit the export of raw materials for cooking oil and cooking oil itself... until a deadline to be determined later," President Joko Widodo said in a statement.

"I will continue to monitor and evaluate the implementation of this policy so that cooking oil in the

country is abundant at affordable prices," he added. Officials introduced limited curbs on palm oil exports in January, capped prices, and announced cash subsidies for some Indonesians to compensate for rising food prices. But the commodity continued to become harder to find at markets and grocery stores, with long queues appearing at many locations.

This week the Attorney General's Office accused an official in the trade ministry of corruption for issuing export permits to palm oil producers when they had not met domestic market obligations.

The office also arrested several high-ranking officials at three of Indonesia's big palm oil companies, including Wilmar Nabati Indonesia, a subsidiary of Singapore-based giant Wilmar International.

Palm oil is the most widely used vegetable oil in Indonesia whereas crude palm oil is exported worldwide for a wide range of uses, from cosmetics to chocolate spread. Vegetable oils are among a number of staple food items that have reached all-time high prices in recent weeks following Russia's invasion of agricultural powerhouse Ukraine, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. — AFP



PEKANBARU, Indonesia: Workers transfer harvested palm fruits to a transport truck before being processed into crude palm oil (CPO) at a palm plantation in Pekanbaru on April 23, 2022. — AFP

## S&P upgrades Greece debt rating to BB+

WASHINGTON: S&P Global Ratings on Friday upgraded Greece's debt rating to BB+, citing its improving economy even as the country deals with the shocks from the war in Ukraine.

"The upgrade reflects our expectation of a continuous improvement in Greece's policy effectiveness, while the fallout from the war in Ukraine appears manageable in light of considerable buffers in both the private and public sectors," the agency said in a statement. The upgrade raised Greece's rating from BB, while S&P put its outlook for the country at stable, citing "our expectation that Greece's fiscal buffers and proven policy effectiveness will allow the country to absorb the indirect impact of the war in Ukraine on its economy and public finances."

Russia's invasion of its neighbor "is the key driver of our projection that Greek GDP growth will decelerate to 3.4 percent in 2022 from 8.3 percent last year" the agency said, "despite low direct export exposure to Russia, significant household savings buffers" and Athens' moves to purchase natural gas from other countries. The country is also struggling with high inflation, but S&P said wages has not increased as a result, and price growth would begin to decrease by September. The agency also noted that fiscal and monetary support from the European Union has boosted Greece's economy and governance, and predicted the country's debt-to-GDP ratio would decrease through 2025 as its economy expands and expenditures lessen. Greece in 2010 was hit by the largest economic crisis in its contemporary history, losing more than a quarter of its GDP. — AFP



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Photo shows Sheikha Intisar Salem Al-Ali posing with her daughter and Iranian artist Reza Doust during his exhibition 'Forty-Three Narrative Portraits' at Den Gallery at Crystal Tower in Kuwait City. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Photo shows Iranian artist Reza Doust posing during his exhibition 'Forty-Three Narrative Portraits' at Den Gallery at Crystal Tower in Kuwait City.



## DOUST'S ART DEPICTS 43 PICTURES OF A YOUNG GIRL

By Faten Omar

Den Gallery at Crystal Tower in Kuwait City is hosting the "Forty-Three Narrative Portraits" exhibition of Iranian artist Reza Doust. The exhibition started from April 19, featuring 43 paintings by the artist, telling the story of his life. Doust, who is based in Canada,

"Kuwait is my second home. My father was from the south of Iran, and I felt Kuwait was similar to my hometown. I moved to Canada in 1998, but I still have lots of friends and family here. People are still inviting me to their homes," he added. Doust holds exhibitions annually and art workshops for young people of Kuwait in appreciation for the community. "I feel I



‘ Kuwait is my second home. My father was from the south of Iran, and I felt Kuwait was similar to my hometown ’

lived in Kuwait from 1993 with his family. "I have a long history in Kuwait. In 1994, I held my first exhibition at Boushahri Art Gallery; since then almost every year I have an exhibition in the country," he said.

have to give something to the society - only then I will get something back."

His love of Kuwait is reflected in his sketchbook. "Today I spent six hours in Souq Al-Mubarakiya. I did not only draw the buildings, but also people who work there. This makes me feel like I belong to the society; I don't feel like a foreigner - I feel like I'm one of them," he pointed out.

The collection of paintings at the exhibition is about a young girl, inspired by the work of Mirza Ali of the Safavid Golden Age (16th Century). The "beautiful girl" is an image that marks the beginning of the

artist's career at the age of eight. "When I was 8 years old, I was working at handicraft shop. The girl in the artwork of Mirza Ali inspired me to mix that beautiful face with my personal experience. Despite my long experience in art, I still struggle to draw that face as beautifully as I saw her. In 2017, when I had an exhibition in Iran, I saw that they had demolished my old house. That is when I started my project of painting the same girl in my own style. I try to represent today's life," Doust said.

The idea of executing this series came to him when he revisited his old neighborhood after years and saw that the house where he was born and which held all his childhood memories was bulldozed. The collection of 43 different pictures of a young girl is part of his memory and a random conversation with himself about the 50 years of his constant experience.

"The girl represents my hometown. I was experimenting with all the knowledge I have in Islamic design and Persian clas-

sic art and mixed them in those paintings. I used the carpet image because I talk about my hometown, as carpets are the most widespread handicraft in Iran. In some paintings, my face will be over hers because the portraits are telling my personal story," he said.

Doust revealed that in his next exhibition next season, he may include some sketches he made in Kuwait.



## Dingoes aren't just feral dogs, says study

Dingoes might look like regular mutts, but in fact they're genetically in between wolves and dogs, according to a new study published Friday in Science Advances. The species-revered in Aboriginal culture but the bane of modern ranchers-has been Australia's top predator since the extinction of Tasmanian tigers last century. However, "the evolutionary position of the dingo has been debated for a substantial period of time," co-author Bill Ballard of La Trobe University and the University of Melbourne told AFP.

Some hold that the lean, tan-colored canines, brought to the continent 5,000 to 8,500 years ago, are simply another form of domestic dog, though one which is far

harder to tame or keep as a pet. Though not normally aggressive, they aren't especially interested in humans. The new research-a global collaboration involving 26 authors from 10 countries-compared the genome of a desert dingo named Sandy, who was rescued in 2014 along with her siblings-to those of five domestic dog breeds and the Greenland wolf.

They found the dingo's genome was structurally distinct from the boxer, German shepherd, basenji, Great Dane and Labrador retriever. But she still shared more similarity with the domestic dogs than with the Greenland wolf. Among the breeds, Sandy was closer to the German shepherd than the rest. "Sandy the desert dingo is intermediate between the wolf and the domestic dogs," concluded Ballard. To be even more sure, the team is sequencing the genome belonging to an alpine dingo, found in the Australian Alps in the country's east.

**Ancient human movements**  
The finding can have several applications. For one, the dingo genome can be used as an ancient reference book to help identify which genes are responsible for genetic disease in modern dogs,

rather than trying to compare between inbred dog breeds. Knowing more about dingo evolution can also illuminate the history of the ancient people who brought them across the sea from Southeast Asia. "At some stage they had to cross some water with some traveling peoples," said Ballard. "Whether they're First Nation Australians or whether they're people that interacted with First Nation

Australians, we don't know."

The team hopes to get a clearer sense of the timeline and start to answer other questions like whether it was a single migration or multiple, once they sequence the alpine dingo. The study also set out to test the differences in how dingoes metabolize nutrients compared to domestic breeds, by running a controlled diet study on a number of dingoes

and German shepherds. Dingoes, like wolves, have only one copy of a gene that creates pancreatic amylase, a protein that helps dogs live on starchy diets, which humans have thrived on especially in the past 10,000 years.

German shepherds have eight copies of the gene. After receiving the same water and rice-rich food for 10 days, the German shepherds' scat was found to contain three bacteria families that helped them in breaking down starch, confirming the researchers' predictions. Like the wolf in North America, dingoes are deeply polarizing: they are romanticized by city dwellers and feature prominently in Indigenous songs and stories, but are hated by farmers for allegedly killing livestock.

According to Ballard, however, dingoes evolved to prey on small marsupials and aren't easily able to digest high-fat foods-thus lambs are more likely being hunted by feral dogs or hybrids. He hopes to test the prediction, and perhaps exonerate the dingo, in future behavior experiments. — AFP



A handout picture shows a wild-born, pure Australian desert dingo called Sandy at 3 weeks of age. — AFP



Head of stores and sales at Hussain Showaiter Sweets Mohammed Ghareb shows the various kinds of Bahraini sweets at the Muharraq island store in northern Bahrain. — AFP photos

# BAHRAINI ARTISANS TOIL TO PRESERVE SUGAR-COATED TRADITION

**B**ahrainis with a sweet tooth have long been spoiled for choice between a wide array of dessert franchises, but traditional confectioners still hold their ground, especially during Ramadan. At the back of his modest shop in the capital Manama, Mohammed Gharib stirs a thick mixture of sugar, saffron and freshly blanched almonds, transforming it into a uniquely Bahraini version of the ubiquitous Middle Eastern dessert: halva. "Bahrain became famous for its confectioneries by being a pioneer in this industry in the Gulf region," Gharib told AFP, adding that their popularity of its establishments "continues until today".

Clad in Bahrain's traditional "shemagh" headdress and white "dish-dasha" robe, the 70-year-old runs one of the country's oldest confectioneries, named after its founder Hussain Mohammed Showaiter, who established it in 1850. "Hussain Mohammed Showaiter was keen to develop this craft, and passed it on to his children and grandchildren," Gharib said. As Bahrainis celebrate Ramadan along with the rest of the Muslim world, the holy month is a period of appreciation for traditional sweets.

For Mohammed Al-Fardan, the famil-



A worker at the Saleh Radhi Al-Halwachi sweet shop makes Bahraini saffron and cardamom cakes known as Khanfarroosh, at his shop.

iar Bahraini confections remain a fixture on tables for the iftar meal, in which the faithful break their dawn-to-dusk fast. "Their presence is a reminder of Bahrain's heritage and sense of hospitality," the 51-year-old banker explained. Though the Gulf region has been swept by a deluge of fast food chains, Fardan is quick to point out that "modern sweets contain preservatives, unlike traditional confectionery".

### 'Main food'

But while the preservation of heritage is at the heart of the confectioners' craft, they are not averse to innovating to appeal to a younger clientele. Saleh Al-Halwaji, who works in his family-owned shop, says: "My father used to work in confectionery and I used to help him after school. "Today, we work in the same field with our own children," he said. Halwaji says he "strives to evolve the sweets and



General Manager at the Hussain Showaiter Sweets and 5th generation member of the family-run business Muhana Fouad Hussain Showaiter shows special packaging introduced in the Muslim month of Ramadan.

keep up with the times while maintaining their popular character".

"We still make everything ourselves and perhaps that is what attracts so many of our customers, who come to buy sweets but also to watch us make them behind the glass," he said. Dalal Al-Shrouqi, an expert in Bahrain's popular heritage, says that "today, technology helps us disseminate everything we want

to preserve of our popular heritage by making it known to future generations". Shrouqi, who has written several books on her country's traditional cuisine, said that while innovative twists are popular, people still prefer "the sweets in their traditional form". "Things evolve, but the original is still the basis." —AFP



Saleh Al-Halwachi, co-owner of Saleh Radhi Al-Halwachi Sweets, makes Bahraini saffron and cardamom cakes known as Khanfarroosh.



Workers prepare Halwa, a Bahraini sweet made primarily from sugar, corn starch, saffron and nuts at Hussain Showaiter Sweets at the Muharraq island store.

## Florida governor signs law revoking Disney's special status

**F**lorida governor Ron DeSantis on Friday signed a law that eliminates a statute that has for decades allowed entertainment giant Disney to act as a local government in Orlando, where it has its theme park. The move was the latest episode in a dispute between DeSantis' Republican administration and Disney, after the company criticized the passage in March of a law banning school lessons on sexual orientation. There was no immediate response by Disney to the decision, part of a cultural battle waged by Republican leaders across the United States.

Disney was initially silent about the law. But widespread criticism of the company, which employs more than 75,000 people in Florida, after it failed to publicly speak out eventually prompted Disney CEO Bob Chapek to condemn it and suspend donations to state politicians. Those remarks rankled DeSantis and prompted the swift approval of Disney's withdrawal of special status, which comes into effect in June 2023.

"You're a corporation based in Burbank, California, and you're gonna marshal your

economic might to attack the parents of my state," said DeSantis, according to NBC news. "We view that as a provocation, and we're going to fight back against that," he said. The Reedy Creek Improvement District was an area created by Florida's congress in 1967 to facilitate the construction of Disney World in Orlando. The area is about 38 square miles (100 square kilometers) and includes two cities and land in Orange and Osceola counties, in central Florida. Under that agreement, Disney runs the district as if the entertainment juggernaut were a local government, including collecting taxes and guaranteeing essential public services such as garbage collection and water treatment.

The decision to scrap the special district has raised doubts about the future of the land. Under Florida law, if the special district is dissolved, its assets and debts would be transferred to local governments that surround the area. "Removing district could transfer \$2 Billion debt from Disney to taxpayers," state Democratic senator Linda Stewart warned Wednesday. — AFP



## One-eyed bandit: Long-lost cat home after being found on oil rig

**A** long-lost cat has been reunited with its owner in Scotland after being found at a North Sea oil rig in a shipping container, the Scottish SPCA animal charity said Friday. The one-eyed black cat was found at an oil rig off the port of Peterhead, on the coast of Aberdeenshire in northeast Scotland, the charity said. The day after workers on the rig contacted the charity, the cat was flown back by helicopter. "We've no idea how the cat ended up there, but attended the heliport this morning to collect him," said rescue officer Aimee Findlay. It emerged the cat had spent five years living as a stray around Peterhead's port area, where staff at the nearby prison fed him and he was known as "One-eyed Joe".

It seems likely that he somehow crept into a shipping container at the port and found himself heading out to the oil rig. When a veterinarian checked him for a chip, it turned out that the seemingly stray cat had an owner waiting for him, however. It emerged that "his real name is Dexter and he has been missing for five years!" the animal charity said. —AFP

## Sports

# Australia primed for 'unparalleled' decade of major sporting events

**SYDNEY:** Australia will over the next decade host a bumper schedule of major international sporting events as part of a long-term plan to boost tourism, health and the economy while also enhancing its global image. The country's welcoming climate, sports-loving people, stable political environment and quality infrastructure have long made it an attractive destination.

But the sheer volume of big sporting events heading to Australia is unprecedented for the nation of 26 million people. Australian Olympic Committee chief Matt Carroll calls it the green and gold - the nation's sporting colors - "runway" culminating in the Brisbane Olympics in 2032. "More than 30 major global sporting events are coming to Australia across the next 10 years," he said.

In addition to the annual Australian Open tennis and Formula One, the country will host cricket's men's Twenty20 World Cup, Women's Basketball World Cup and the UCI road cycling world championships this year. It will then jointly hold football's Women's World Cup with New Zealand in 2023, a British and Irish Lions rugby tour in 2025, Commonwealth Games in 2026, Netball World Cup in 2027 and Presidents Cup golf a year later.

An expected announcement next month that it will also stage back-to-back men's and women's Rugby World Cups in 2027 and 2029 will further cement Australia's status as a sporting powerhouse. "Sport brings health, educational and wellbeing benefits to the community and can play a pivotal role in getting Australians active, reducing obesity and other health-related problems including mental illness," said Carroll.

## 'Feel-good factors'

Bidding for big events is part of Sport 2030, a

government roadmap established in 2018 that recognizes the broader economic and social implications of sport, which is already deeply embedded in Australia's culture and identity. But hosting a huge competition such as the Olympics comes with a financial price tag. "The return on investment is a complex issue," Popi Sotiriadou, an associate professor of sport management at Queensland's Griffith University, told AFP.

"There are things that we can't measure - you can't put a money value on national pride. There are so many of what we call 'public goods' that do not necessarily translate to dollars. There are legacies in terms of feel-good factors, people feel that connectedness with each other. And with any big sporting events we have that trickle-down effect, that inspirational effect of elite athletes' success, the promotion of community, the boost to tourism, we have trade benefits, employment benefits, infrastructure benefits, better public facilities."

Sports Minister Richard Colbeck called the coming blitz of events "unparalleled in our history" as Australia seeks to "grow our reputation as the pre-eminent sporting host nation in the world". According to government data, 14 million Australians participate in sport every year, millions attend live games and the sector generates about three percent of gross domestic product.

It is big business, delivering Aus\$83 billion (US\$61 billion) of combined economic, health and educational benefits annually, with a return on investment of Aus\$7 for every dollar spent, Sport 2030 says.

## Experienced host

Australia has long been praised for its ability to host big-ticket showpieces, stemming from the



SYDNEY: A file photo shows a giant flag with the Olympic Rings stretched by hundreds of participants over the grounds of the Olympic Stadium during the opening ceremony of the 2000 Summer Olympics. —AFP

2000 Sydney Olympics, which were widely seen as setting a benchmark. Then-International Olympic Committee president Juan Antonio Samaranch famously declared them "the best ever" - and not only from an operations perspective but everything from venue design and construction to management and marketing.

More than 20 years later, those skills have been honed even further. Rugby Australia chief executive Andy Marinos, who is involved in the Rugby World

Cup bid, said it made a big difference having strong government and public support. "That's one of the benefits of operating in a country like Australia," he told SportsPro magazine. "Because there's such familiarity with having to host and engage on major events. The states and certainly the federal government are quite well versed in it so they understand that once you put a very compelling economic impact assessment in front of them, the decision-making process is relatively straightforward." —AFP



LOS ANGELES: Ko Jin-young of South Korea tees off the 18th hole during the second round of the DIO Implant LA Open at Wilshire Country Club on April 22, 2022. —AFP

## Top-ranked Ko shares LA LPGA lead with Hataoka

**LOS ANGELES:** World number one Ko Jin-young fired eight birdies in a seven-under par 64 on Friday to grab a share of the second-round lead alongside Japan's Nasa Hataoka in the LPGA's Los Angeles Open. Ko, aiming to bounce back from a disappointing finish in the first major of the year at Rancho Mirage two weeks ago, reeled off four birdies in a row from the 11th through the 14th at Wilshire Country Club to power up the leaderboard.

She shot a seven-under 135, tied with Hataoka, whose three-under 67 included birdies on her last three holes. "My putting was so good today," Ko said. "I wasn't expecting to play really well today, because in the afternoon it's always hard to play this course. But my putting was good, so I'm happy with it." Ko, who added her fifth back-nine birdie on the 17th, said she didn't even realize she'd played the back nine in five-under. "I didn't know that, I was in the zone," she said.

The 26-year-old South Korean, who won five times last year and added her 13th LPGA title in Singapore last month, is coming off a disappointing share of 53rd at the Chevron Championship. "I have two more rounds and nobody knows how it goes," she said. "So (I'm) working hard and focusing on it and go get it." Hataoka, chasing her sixth LPGA title, said the breezy weather again made things tricky. —AFP

## 'Incredible' Alcaraz reaches Barcelona semi and top 10

**BARCELONA:** Carlos Alcaraz defeated top seed Stefanos Tsitsipas in a three-set rollercoaster to reach the Barcelona semi-finals on Friday and become the youngest player since Rafael Nadal in 2005 to make the world top 10. The 18-year-old Spaniard saw off world number five Tsitsipas, who had successfully defended his Monte Carlo Masters title last weekend, 6-4, 5-7, 6-2.

On Monday, Alcaraz will become the first teenager to make the top 10 since Andy Murray in 2007 and youngest since compatriot and 21-time major winner Nadal 17 years ago. "Probably my biggest win on clay court. It was unbelievable," said Alcaraz on court. "Unbelievable match, unbelievable atmosphere that I lived today on court. It was unbelievable everything. It was incredible."

Alcaraz's 21st match win of 2022 could have been wrapped up in straight sets when he led 4-1 in the second set. However, he recovered and swept through the decider to set up a semi-final showdown against Australia's Alex De Minaur as he looks to take another step closer to a third title of the year after Rio and the Miami Masters.

Friday's victory was his third in three meetings

against Greek star Tsitsipas whose mood on Friday was not helped when he was handed two separate point penalties for a mid-set break at 0-3 down in the third set and a time violation. In all 12 matches took place Friday after only two were possible on Thursday as heavy rain drenched the city.

De Minaur saw off British fourth seed Cameron Norrie 6-3, 5-7, 6-1 in his quarterfinal. Earlier in the day, Norrie had needed an exhausting three and a half hours to defeat Marton Fucsovics 7-5, 6-7 (9/11), 6-4 in his delayed third round clash. By contrast, De Minaur booked his quarter-final place when South Africa's Lloyd Harris retired after dropping the first set 6-0.

Pablo Carreno Busta and Diego Schwartzman will meet in the other semi-final after also pulling double duty on Friday. Carreno Busta saved three match points against second-seeded Casper Ruud of Norway and then overcame an early break in the third set to survive 4-6, 7-6 (8/10), 6-3, after three hours. "I'm so, so happy for this victory," said the 30-year-old Spaniard who beat Lorenzo Sonego in another three-setter earlier in the day. "It was very emotional today playing in front of my people, in my home, I was a set down after playing three hours this morning, so it's very, very tough to come back."

Schwartzman, the sixth seed, made the semi-finals by defeating third-seeded Felix Auger-Aliassime, 3-6, 6-2, 6-3. The Argentine spent just over four hours on court Friday, beating Lorenzo Musetti, 6-4, 7-5 in the third round. —AFP

## Kuwait SC win volleyball title

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Sports Club volleyball team won the Federation's Cup after beating Kazma 3-1 in the final held on Saturday at Saad Al-Abdullah Complex. Kuwait SC have now won the Football Premier League, the Federation's Cup and the refresher tournament.

Head of the volleyball department at the club said he was happy for winning the title, adding the titles came as a result of hard work and long-term planning by the administration and technical departments. Head of the Volleyball Federation Dr Abdelhadi Al-Shibeeb said the national team is ready for the Gulf Games to be hosted by Kuwait from May 15 to 31. He said the team will hold a 17-day training camp in Serbia.

## Special Ramadan bowling tourney concludes

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** The Fourth Ramadan Bowling Tournament of the Special Olympics was organized by Tumooh Sports Club at the Bowling Club in Salmiya with the participation of 48 players of both genders. The two-day tournament saw the women's doubles team of Anwar Al-Ghadban and Fatima Al-Hareeri from Kuwait Academy win first place, Ayat Al-Tulaibi and Mariam Al-Hindi from Yumooh in second place, and Loulwa Al-Hajji and Rawan Al-Balhan from Tumooh and Warba winning third place.

In the second women's group, Maha Al-Khashti and Sheikh Al-Hindi from Tumooh won first place, Sukaina Al-Saffar and Sabeeha Khuzaim from Ikhlas were second, while Nour Al-Hawwash and Shahad Al-Qallaf from Nour Academy and Hope School came third.

In the first men's group, Fahad Al-Mulla and Faqaz Al-Qassar from Tumooh stood first, Bader Al-Suweidan and Mushari Al-Araifi from Ican were second, with Hamad Bughaith and Yousuf Hassan



KUWAIT: Kuwait SC volleyball team celebrate with the Federation's Cup.

from Kuwait National third. In the second group, Yousuf Rashid and Faisal Al-Mutairi from Al-Huda School stood first, Saleh Al-Hasawi and Ali Qasim from Ikhlas were second, while Abdallah Al-Jimaz and Al-Shaker from Abeer Voluntary in third.

In the third group, Mohsen Al-Mashmoom and Nawaf Al-Qassar from Tumooh were first, Abdullah Al-Otaibi and Sultan Mizel from Kuwait Society for Disabled Care came second, while Hassan Jasim and Omar Waleed from Kuwait Academy stood third. In the fourth group, Mohammad Al-Tarkait and Ali

Shihab from Hope School came first, Abdullah Al-Daihani and Hussein Ali from Nibras were second, with Barrak Al-Ajmi and Ibrahim Hussein from Warba third.

National Director of Kuwait Special Olympics Rihab Buresli lauded the turnout and the participation of 14 institutions, in addition to the improvement of the players' skills. Buresli thanked the Public Authority for Sport, the Bowling Club and the Regional Presidency of Special Olympics and all those who contributed to the tournament's success.



KUWAIT: Winners are honored at the special bowling tournament.

## Cantlay, Schauffele maintain Zurich Classic lead

**LOS ANGELES:** Patrick Cantlay and Xander Schauffele combined for a four-under par 68 in Friday's foursomes second round to maintain their one-shot lead in the US PGA Tour's Zurich Classic of New Orleans. Reigning FedEx Cup champion Cantlay and Tokyo Olympic gold medallist Xander Schauffele produced five birdies and a bogey at TPC Avondale to stay in front in the tour's only two-man team event a day after they fired a red-hot 59 in the fourball first round.

"I think we just wanted to hit a bunch of quality golf shots, and we did that today," Cantlay said of how the duo had hoped to follow up their impressive first round. "We really fought hard and made a bunch of those mid-range putts, especially in the middle of the round, and that kind of kept the momentum going. It's kind of tricky out there with the wind how it is, so I thought we played a nice round today."

Cantlay acknowledged that Friday's alternate-shot format was more difficult. But they made a strong start, with Schauffele's second shot at the 10th leaving Cantlay a three-foot birdie putt. They picked up another birdie, where Schauffele's third shot into the green left Cantlay a tap-in. After a



AVONDALE, Louisiana: Xander Schauffele and Patrick Cantlay line up a putt on the seventh green during the second round of the Zurich Classic of New Orleans at TPC Louisiana on April 22, 2022. —AFP

bogey at the 12th, they picked up a birdie at the 13th, where Schauffele rolled in a seven-foot putt. He drained a six and a half-footer for birdie at the second and Cantlay jarred a 10-foot birdie putt at the fourth.

"Alternate-shot is an opportunity to do some cool things if you're making a lot of birdies, but for the most part you're trying to leave your partner in a good spot to make an easy par," Schauffele said. "A lot of times pars aren't going to hurt you, and if you can pick up a birdie in this kind of wind playing alternate-shot, you're doing a good thing." —AFP

## Sports

# Hawks hold off Heat, Bucks thrash Bulls in NBA playoffs

LOS ANGELES: Trae Young delivered the game-winner for Atlanta in a 111-110 victory over the Miami Heat on Friday as the Hawks clawed their way back into their NBA playoff first-round series. The Hawks cut the deficit in their best-of-seven Eastern Conference first-round series to 2-1. The reigning NBA champion Milwaukee Bucks grabbed a 2-1 series lead with a 111-81 rout of the Chicago Bulls, and the Phoenix Suns took a 2-1 series lead with a 114-111 victory over the Pelicans in New Orleans.

In Atlanta, PJ Tucker's three-pointer with less than a minute to play had put the Heat up 110-109 as the clash in Atlanta came down to the frantic final minutes. With 5.5 seconds remaining Young drove the lane and floated in the basket that proved the difference, with Miami star Jimmy Butler watching his contested three-point effort at the buzzer bounce off the rim.

"I just wanted to try to get to the basket," said Young, who scored 24 points to lead six Hawks players in double figures. "I knew there was only 10 seconds left... I didn't want to settle for a three. So I tried to get all the way to the rim and either get a foul or a layup." The top-seeded Heat had won the first two games of the best-of-seven Eastern Conference series at home.

Their chances of taking a 3-0 stranglehold looked good when a 21-0 scoring run in the third quarter saw them take an 84-68 lead in a game that was delayed more than half an hour after a suspicious package was found outside the Hawks' arena before the game. But the Hawks, no doubt well aware that no NBA team has come back from a 3-0 deficit to win a best-of-seven series, closed the third on a 9-1 scoring run.

Young's three-pointer knotted the score at 104-

104 with 2:26 remaining and it was a dogfight from there. Bogdan Bogdanovic scored 18 points off the bench for Atlanta. That included three three-pointers in the Hawks' fourth-quarter fight-back. "We're not losing this game, that's what was on my mind the whole game and that's the way we played, especially last quarter," Bogdanovic said. "We kept believing."

Young scored 10 points in the final frame and Bogdanovic had nine as the Hawks rallied after being out-scored 31-16 in the third. "The way we played, the way we didn't quit until the end, this shows us the character of the team," Bogdanovic said. Tyler Herro led Miami with 24 points. Butler and Max Strus added 20 apiece, Butler shaking off a collision with John Collins that sent him crashing to the floor under the basket in the opening minutes.

Miami point guard Kyle Lowry scored just six points before he was ruled out with a hamstring injury in the third quarter. The Hawks will try to level the series at two games apiece when they host game four on Sunday. In Chicago, the Bucks shook off the injury absence of Khris Middleton to cruise to a big win over the Bulls. After DeMar DeRozan scored 41 points in a 114-110 game-two triumph that leveled the series at one game each, the Bucks held DeRozan to just 11 points on four-of-nine shooting. Grayson Allen scored 22 points off the bench for Milwaukee to help make up for Middleton's absence.

## Paul leads Suns

Bucks superstar Giannis Antetokounmpo and Bobby Portis - who started in Middleton's spot - scored 18 points apiece. Nikola Vucevic led the Bulls with 19 points, but the Bucks dominated, leading by as many as 37 points in the final quarter. The



ATLANTA: Bogdan Bogdanovic #13 of the Atlanta Hawks shoots against Dewayne Dedmon #21 of the Miami Heat during second half in Game Three of the Eastern Conference First Round at State Farm Arena on April 22, 2022. —AFP

Suns were also without a key player, with Devin Booker sidelined by a hamstring strain. "We knew we were down our MVP in Book, and we all had to step up," said veteran point guard Chris Paul, who scored 19 of his 28 points in the fourth quarter.

Paul scored 15 of the Suns' first 23 points in the

final period and handed out 14 assists - remarkably without a turnover. "I'm just happy we got the win," Paul said. Deandre Ayton added 28 points and 17 rebounds for the top-seeded Suns, who withstood a 34-point performance from the Pelicans' Brandon Ingram. —AFP

## Barcelona crush Wolfsburg in Champions League

BARCELONA: Holders Barcelona continued their torrid scoring form as they tore Wolfsburg apart in the first half of their women's Champions League semi-final on the way to a 5-1 first leg win at the Camp Nou on Friday. Before a women's world record crowd of 91,648 at the Camp Nou, Barcelona repeatedly caught Wolfsburg flat footed in the first half.

"One of the keys was to start off well and get the crowd involved. Both attitude and our level of play were the best we could give and the crowd pushed us on to do that. We had three chances in the opening five minutes, which helped us and demoralised the opponent," said Barcelona coach Jonatan Giraldez.

The attendance broke the record of 91,553 set three weeks ago at the Camp Nou as Barcelona beat Real Madrid in the quarterfinals. "We will remember this as we grow old. It's so special to experience a day like this," said Barcelona midfielder Patricia Guijarro. The Wolfsburg captain agreed. "For women's soccer, it's extraordinary," said Dominique Janssen.

Barcelona scored 146 goals in 27 matches as they won the Spanish league title and had hit 32 in the Champions League, but they had not scored in four previous meetings with Wolfsburg. After two minutes, Aitana Bonmati changed that. Left back Fridolina Rolfö lofted a free kick from deep in the Barcelona half into the gap behind the Wolfsburg center backs, as they turned ponderously and uncertainly. Bonmati scampered past and tucked the ball home. "We knew what their shortcomings were defensively," said Giraldez.

Caroline Graham Hansen added a second after 10 minutes. Ana-Maria Crnogorčević stole the ball and played it into the Norwegian who had plenty of time to pick her finish. In the 33rd minute, Marta Torrejon cut in from the right and once again was allowed time to choose between team-mates in front of goal,



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Spanish midfielder Alexia Putellas and teammates celebrate their victory at the end of the UEFA Women's Champions League semifinal first-leg match against Wolfsburg at the Camp Nou stadium on April 22, 2022. —AFP

cutting the ball back to Jennifer Hermoso, who curled a shot into the far corner.

Inevitably, Ballon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas joined the scorers, outpacing and out-muscling the center-backs as she ran on to a through ball and shot through goalie Almuth Schult. "It's probably one of the best first halves we've had so far this season," said Giraldez. Crnogorčević had a close range strike disallowed for offside at the start of the second half and even though Barcelona continued to create chances, their finishing touch was less sure as Schult pulled off a string of saves.

Jill Roord gave Wolfsburg hope as she broke through to score after 73 minutes. But Putellas restored the four-goal lead with five minutes to play. She broke into the box and drew a clumsy challenge from Janssen. Then rolled the penalty

pulled away in the end to win 10-4. "It was great, I enjoyed it," Vafaei said afterwards. "I'm happy to make history for my country, that was a very good moment for me and snooker. "It was a great journey and I really enjoyed it."

Vafaei - who dedicated his ranking title, the Snooker Shoot Out, to his grandmother who died a few days before he beat former world champion Mark Williams - said he would learn from his defeat. "It doesn't matter that I've lost," he said. "Life has ups and downs. I will come back stronger, the same as always. This is just the beginning."

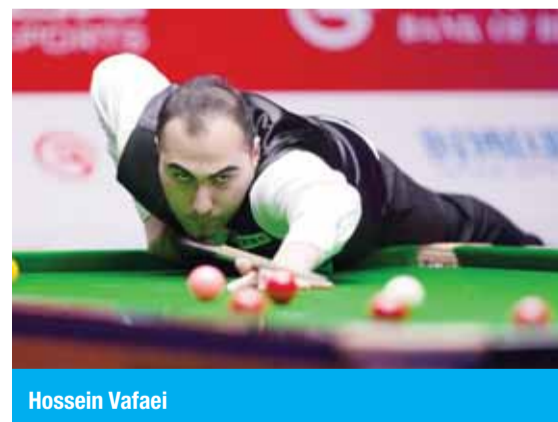
Vafaei said he hoped his exploits would spark fellow players back in Iran and further interest in the sport. "As a snooker player, we all dream to play at the home of snooker which is the Crucible," he said. "It was fantastic, a very big achievement for me and my country. I come from a country with very little snooker history. I came to the UK with one suitcase, one cue, no coach. Imagine how odd it

Pant and Amre intervened from the dugout during the dispute on Friday evening over a full toss delivery that they believed was a no-ball. Capitals' pacer Shardul Thakur was penalized 50 percent of his match fee. The trio admitted to the Level 2 offence under Article 2.7 of the IPL Code of Conduct and accepted the sanction, IPL said in a statement on Saturday.

Amre was also banned for one match. The Capitals were chasing the Royals' 222 and needed 36 runs to win from the last over at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium. Royman Powell struck three consecutive sixes off Obed McCoy's first three balls, the third of them on the controversial hip-high full toss.

into the corner of the net. "We had never even scored against Wolfsburg, let alone beat them, but we have shown our ambition and that is the beauty of football," said Guijarro. "They knocked us out two years ago and today we have played like this."

Barcelona had 20 shots on target over the match while the Bundesliga leaders managed just three. "It was incredible to experience this atmosphere tonight, but it can't be seen as an excuse," said Wolfsburg striker Tabea Wassmuth. The teams meet again in Wolfsburg on April 30. The winner will face either Lyon or Paris Saint-Germain in the final. The French teams play their first leg on Sunday. "It is quite clear that Barca can already plan their trip to the final," said Wolfsburg coach Tommy Stroot. "Our job will be to show a different face." —AFP



Hossein Vafaei

was for me. It was tough but few people understand me because they have never been in my position. Hopefully, I can be a good model for the Iranian players and people." —AFP

The on-field umpires signaled a six but did not declare the delivery a no-ball, prompting an argument between the umpires and batsmen Powell and Kuldeep Yadav. Pant and other players joined from the dugout, gesticulating to their on-field teammates to pursue the argument in violation of the rules.

According to the rules, deliveries cannot be referred for a no-ball unless a wicket is being reviewed. Pant initially asked the batters to walk off before sending Amre into the playing arena to demand a no-ball review from the umpires, who sent him back to the dugout. The match resumed after a long delay and Capitals eventually lost the game by 15 runs. —AFP

## Iranian snooker player Vafaei proud of exploits

LONDON: Hossein Vafaei may have bowed out of the world snooker championship at the first hurdle but he said being the first Iranian to appear at the sport's showpiece event was "a very big achievement for me and my country". The 27-year-old has enjoyed a breakthrough season, becoming the first Iranian to win a ranking tournament, and capping it by appearing at the historic Crucible Theatre after coming through two qualifying rounds.

Vafaei - who has shot up to number 18 in the world rankings - was all square at 3-3 with 2019 world champion Judd Trump before the Englishman

## IPL fines Delhi Capitals players over no-ball row

NEW DELHI: Delhi Capitals skipper Rishabh Pant and assistant coach Pravin Amre were fined their entire match fees Saturday over a furious row with the on-field umpires in their Indian Premier League match against Rajasthan Royals.

## Hong Kong horse racing gallops on through pandemic

HONG KONG: For more than two years, people in Hong Kong have lived under some of the toughest coronavirus restrictions in the world. But one beloved tradition has persisted: Horse racing. Throughout the pandemic the Chinese city has gone to great lengths to protect the sport from shut-downs, even as schools closed and infections tore through elderly care homes.

But some at the heart of the racing scene have baulked at the personal costs of complying with restrictions, with at least two overseas jockeys leaving and others fearing for their mental health. Since 2020, The Hong Kong Jockey Club, which has a monopoly on the industry in the city, has mostly conducted races behind closed doors and isolated riders from the local community.

Australian jockey Blake Shinn said last week that the "mental stress" meant he would not return for next season. "I understand that the club's priority has been to keep racing going during a difficult time... but at a certain point it becomes a mental health issue," Shinn was quoted saying in the South China Morning Post.

Jockeys and trainers have been required to stay home during off-hours and avoid mixing with people outside their household. Shinn compared it to being in jail. Another Australian jockey, Daniel Moor, returned home in March saying Hong Kong's pandemic rules - which include largely sealing off the borders to the outside world - had separated him from his family. Four-time champion jockey Zac Purton told AFP that the restrictions were a "fair trade-off" but acknowledged the personal toll it took on riders. "It is deterring jockeys from overseas from wanting to come to Hong Kong at the moment," he said.

### 'Painful'

Former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping once promised that Hong Kong would retain its way of life after being handed over to China in 1997, saying "horse racing will continue and dancing parties will go on". The latter has ground to a halt throughout much of the pandemic, but racing has carried on, and by some estimates even thrived.

The sport is fanatically followed in Hong Kong and it is estimated that more than 10 percent of the city's 7.4 million population hold a Jockey Club betting account, the only way to bet legally in Hong Kong. In the most recently available figures, the Jockey Club posted a record HK\$136 billion (US\$17.3 billion) turnover for its 2020-21 racing season, which its chief executive Winfried Engelbrecht-Bresges partly attributed to the "collective discipline of all participants".

Hong Kong enjoyed two largely virus-free years with its zero-COVID policy, but that approach collapsed in January with the more transmissible Omicron variant. Schools, gyms, playgrounds and even beaches closed as the city saw infection rates and deaths spike, but racing galloped on behind closed doors. With Jockey Club off-course betting branches also closed, people were still able to gamble online or over the phone.

But "bubble" measures have been hard on those who keep the sport going. Purton was injured in a December race but the club initially wanted to "protect the bubble" and stopped him from seeking external help. "If I didn't get the treatments I needed, I wasn't going to be able to continue to ride," Purton told AFP. The club later relented.

Matthew Chadwick, Hong Kong's second most successful local jockey, said he found the restrictions tolerable but they were "painful" for his children, who also had to follow the stay-at-home rules at the worst of the pandemic last month. "I think everyone has sacrificed a lot and has their own threshold, and some feel they've been pushed too far," Chadwick told AFP. —AFP



LONDON: Manchester United's Portuguese striker Cristiano Ronaldo shoots past Arsenal's English goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale to score during their English Premier League match at the Emirates Stadium on April 23, 2022. —AFP

## Arsenal see off sorry Man United

LONDON: Arsenal took control of the battle to finish in the Premier League top four with a 3-1 win over Manchester United to all but end the Red Devils' hopes of Champions League football next season. Nuno Tavares, Bukayo Saka and Granit Xhaka struck for Mikel Arteta's men to move them three points clear of Tottenham, who face Brentford later on Saturday.

Sixth-placed United are six points adrift of the top four and could miss out on European football completely next season. Cristiano Ronaldo scored his 22nd goal of the season on his return to the United side after missing Tuesday's 4-0 thrashing at Liverpool due to the death of his newborn son.

However, Ronaldo will regret letting Bruno Fernandes take a second-half penalty with the game finely poised at 2-1 to the Gunners. Interim United boss Ralf Rangnick described his side's display at Anfield as "humiliating" and "embarrassing". United reacted to that defeat by formalizing the appointment of Ajax boss Erik ten Hag as the man to take charge at Old Trafford from next season.

However, the Dutchman will not have been

impressed by another shambolic start from the side he will inherit. Harry Maguire was dropped to the bench after a traumatic week. The England international's house was searched by police after receiving a bomb threat.

Maguire has been the target for much of the criticism directed at United this season, but the defense was no better in his absence. It took just two minutes for the visitors' to be breached as David de Gea's fine save from Saka's initial effort counted for nothing as Tavares swept home the rebound.

There was another show of support for Ronaldo as just as at Anfield in midweek the entire stadium applauded during the seventh minute. On the field, the Portuguese was receiving little help from his teammates. De Gea stood up well to parry a piledriver from Eddie Nketiah from close range. Seconds later, Nketiah found the net from another one-on-one.

A VAR review found the England under-21 international offside, but Saka was fouled by Alex Telles as he played the ball into Nketiah's path. Saka took

responsibility to send De Gea the wrong way from the penalty spot to double Arsenal's lead. Ronaldo hit back within two minutes as he swept home Nemanja Matic's cross for his 100th Premier League goal.

Arsenal's nerves began to show and United should have been at least level by the time Xhaka fired home the final blow. Tavares needlessly handled a corner into the Arsenal box on the hour. Ronaldo stood aside to let Fernandes take the penalty, but his compatriot rolled the ball onto the post.

Moments later, Ronaldo had the ball in the net thanks to another smart, instinctive finish but was flagged offside. Ronaldo then played provider for Diogo Dalot's shot to be turned onto the post by Aaron Ramsdale. Arsenal had lost three consecutive games prior to a much-needed 4-2 win at Chelsea in midweek revived their top-four ambitions. The relief around the Emirates was palpable when Xhaka restored the two-goal cushion with a powerful shot that flew past De Gea from 25 yards. —AFP



Mohamed Salah

## Mohamed Salah undecided over Liverpool future

LONDON: Mohamed Salah admits he has not decided if he wants to stay at Liverpool beyond his current contract as the Egypt star sparked fresh speculation about a possible Anfield exit. Salah will be out of contract at the end of next season and has yet to sign a new deal despite months of negotiations. The 29-year-old reportedly wants to be made the Premier League's highest-paid player, with wages of around £500,000 (\$642,000) per week.

Speaking to FourFourTwo magazine, Salah suggested it was not certain he would remain with Jurgen Klopp's side, who are chasing an unprecedented quadruple this season. "I have one year left," said the forward. "I think the fans know what I want, but in the contract it's not everything about the money at all. So I don't know, I can't tell you exactly, I have one year left." Salah has established himself as a Liverpool great since signing from Roma in 2017.

He has scored 155 goals in 245 appearances in all competitions, helping Liverpool win their first Premier League title in 30 years in 2020, as well as the 2019 Champions League. He leads the Premier League goalscoring charts again this season, with 22 goals so far. Offering hope to Liverpool fans, Salah said: "This club means a lot to me. I've enjoyed my football here more than anywhere. I gave the club everything and everybody saw that. 'I've had a lot of unbelievable moments here, winning trophies, individual goals, individual trophies. It's like a family here.'" —AFP

## Colombia's Rincon not wearing seatbelt properly in fatal crash

BOGOTA: Colombian football great Freddy Rincon was not properly using a seat belt when he died in a traffic accident, investigators said on Friday. The former international attacking midfielder known as the "Colossus" died in mid-April after a collision between the vehicle he was travelling in and a bus in the southwest city of Cali. But forensic expert Jorge Paredes told journalists that Rincon was not using a seatbelt "in an adequate manner" at the time of the accident.

He suffered a "brain hemorrhage" as well as other "trauma and injuries" that led to his death aged 55, two days after the accident. Investigators said he was wearing the safety belt around his waist but not across his torso. They also insisted that Rincon was the driver who ran a red light, despite denials from his family who claim he was merely a passenger in the vehicle.

Videos and photographs taken shortly before the accident showed Rincon in the driver's seat. Rincon had been to a nightclub and then a restaurant on the night he died. The crash happened at around 4:15 am. It has still not been determined whether or not Rincon had been drinking alcohol. Rincon was part of a talented Colombian team that qualified for the 1990 World Cup finals, ending



BOGOTA: Colombian forensic expert Jorge Paredes delivers a press conference on April 22, 2022 related to the death of former Colombian football player Freddy Rincon in a traffic accident. —AFP

their 28-year absence from football's most prestigious tournament.

He is particularly remembered for a last-minute goal in their 1-1 draw against powerful West

Germany, the eventual World Cup winners. He played for Spanish giants Real Madrid, Italians Napoli and Brazilian pair Corinthians and Palmeiras during his career. —AFP